ISSUE 405
EMPIRE SEPTEMBER 2022

ANDOR STAR WARS GOES ROGUE

EMPIRE

SEPTEMBER
2022

FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS
BRET & JEMAINE REUNITED!

9 770957 494283 09
£5.25 $11.75 USD $12.75 CAN



GAME OF THRONES RETURNS!

HOUSE of the DRAGON

YOUR ALL-ACCESS PASS TO WESTEROS' BLOODY NEW SAGA

PLUS

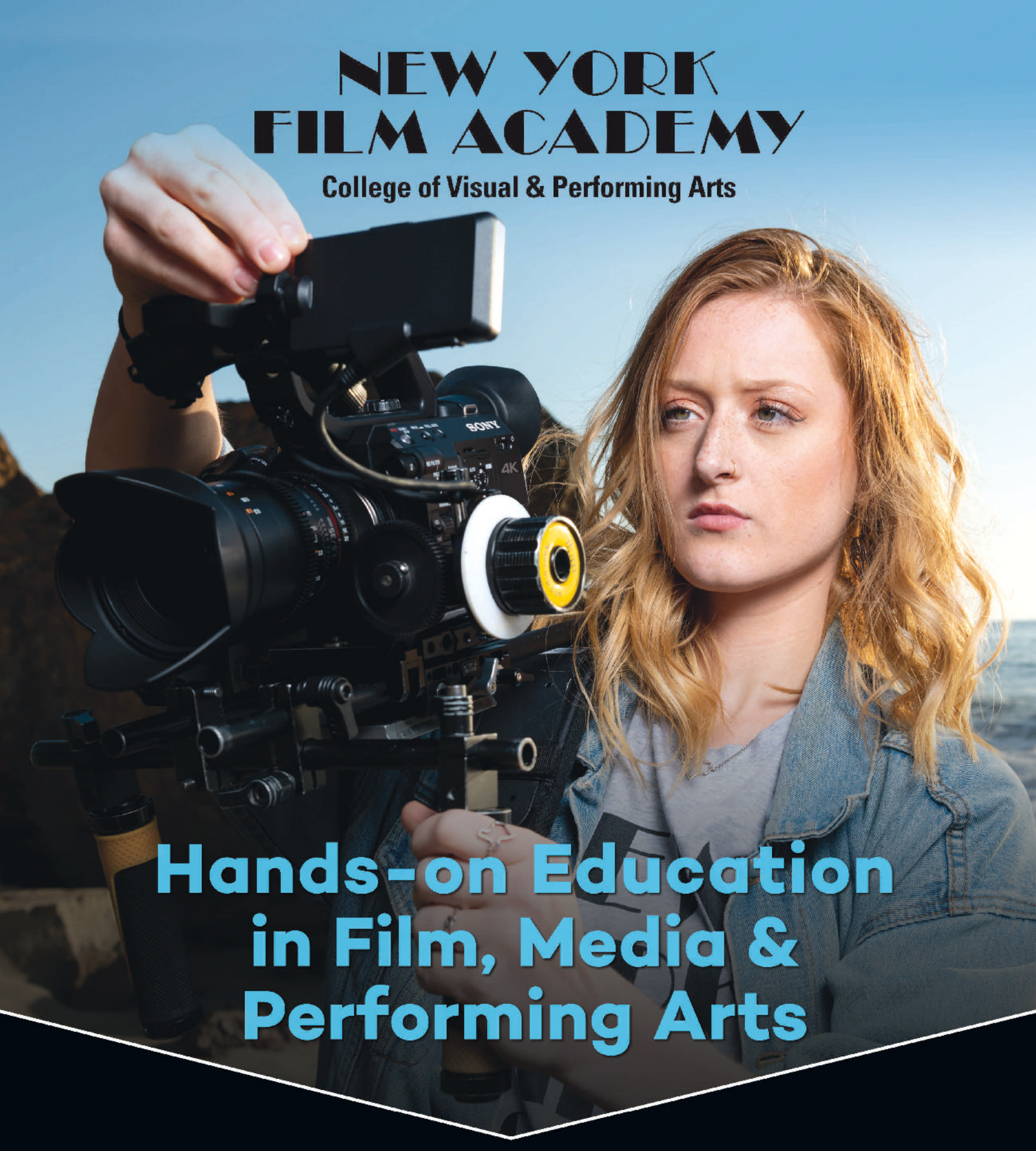
THE WOMAN KING
VIOLA DAVIS GOES TO WAR

CLERKS III
BACK IN BUSINESS

SAMUEL L. JACKSON
ALL HAIL THE KING OF COOL

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON • THE WOMAN KING • ANDOR • GANGS OF LONDON • FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS

"Hey, just wondering, you know, dragon to dragon, if you wouldn't mind telling me where... Owl Owl Owl"



NEW YORK FILM ACADEMY

College of Visual & Performing Arts

Hands-on Education in Film, Media & Performing Arts

NYFA.EDU

New York • Los Angeles • South Beach, Miami • Australia • Italy • Online

Not all programs are offered at all locations.

DRACARYS! As anyone who knows their Drogon from their Rhaegal will be aware, that's the high Valyrian word for dragonfire, deployed in *Game Of Thrones* to unleash white-hot hell-flames. And that's precisely what we're doing in this issue of *Empire*, bringing you a deep dive into the all-new, just-as-lethal and more-dragony-than-ever Westeros.

HBO's *House Of The Dragon* will feature more bone-melting heat and political machinations than a British summertime. And we dispatched our finest dragon-rider, Dan Jolin, on a mission to penetrate the series' veil of secrecy. Sadly, he didn't end up on the Iron Throne ("Too spiky," he grumbled), but he did send a raven to *Empire* Towers to drop off a scroll bearing a thrilling long read, complete with interviews with the cast and showrunners. Though frankly, we wish he'd just sent an email.

Elsewhere, Viola Davis tells Amon Warmann why *The Woman King* was the film she had to make. The late, great James Caan is saluted by Christina Newland, who spoke to him just months before he passed away. Plus we catch up with Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement, aka Flight Of The Conchords, about their heady days putting together their own HBO show, a series that has laughs, pathos and even a dragon, albeit a cartoon one called Albi.

Beyond these pages, the *Empire* experience has never been more versatile. Check out our new digital app, which allows you to read us anywhere (on a bus, a plane, beyond The Wall), with bonus content to boot. And if you want to go all-in, sign up as an *Empire* VIP, with all kinds of perks. Just ask the 100 lucky readers who got to hang out with Ryan Gosling, Chris Evans and Ana de Armas in July at our VIP screening of *The Gray Man*. It was a red-hot event... and we didn't even need to say DRACARYS!

Enjoy the issue.



NICK DE SEMLYEN
EDITOR
@nickdesemlyen

SUBSCRIBE TO EMPIRE



This month's exclusive subscriber cover by Peter Strain

TURN TO PAGE 8 FOR DETAILS ON HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Mike Cathro, Chloë Hill, Marco Vittur

EMPIRE

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO THIS MONTH

REUNITING FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS



The Rhymenoceros and the Hiphopopotamus, together again! To mark the 15th anniversary of their HBO show, we reunited "New Zealand's fourth-most-popular comedy-folk duo" for an exclusive photoshoot and a chat. See the results on page 58.

TAKING ON CULT ACTION LEGEND SCOTT ADKINS



Action hero Scott Adkins took time out from his busy schedule of beating people up in films to do gymnastic feats for us in a Birmingham park. No ducks were harmed in the making of this feature, which starts on page 72.

EMPIRE VIP CLUB SCREENING OF *THE GRAY MAN*



Empire VIP members were treated to a special screening of *The Gray Man* at BFI Southbank, with stars including Ryan Gosling and Chris Evans in attendance. Find out more about our VIP membership at empireonline.com/vip.

Empire, ISSN 0957-4948 (USPS 6398) is published every four weeks by H Bauer Publishing Ltd, Media House, Peterborough Business Park, Lynch Wood, Peterborough, PE2 6EA, United Kingdom.The US annual subscription price is $111.65. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US Postmaster: Send address changes to *Empire*, World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Bauer Media, Subscriptions, CDS Global, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leicester LE16 9EF, United Kingdom. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

CONTENTS



TAKE 20

10 GANGS OF LONDON
'Ere! Cor blimey, guv'nor, the gangs of old London town are back, and no mistake! And showrunner Corin Hardy tells us all about the bloody mayhem in store for Season 2! STONE THE CROWS!

15 TRAILER TALK
Team *Empire* examines the trailer for Kevin Smith's *Clerks III*. They weren't even meant to be here today!

18 GWENDOLINE CHRISTIE
Q-ing and A-ing with the star of *Flux Gourmet*.

24 TRIANGLE OF SADNESS
Sounds like an early Manic Street Preachers song; is, in fact, the new Ruben Östlund movie, and as such this is one triangle that is very much going to be more than the sum of its parts. Suck it, Pythagoras.

31 PINT OF MILK
Does Lee Pace love *le* pasteurised?

FEATURES

50 HOUSE OF THE DRAGON
Game Of Thrones isn't over yet. *House Of The Dragon* is the eagerly awaited prequel to the HBO fantasy epic, and *Empire* — first of its name, rightful ruler of all film magazines, breaker of world exclusives, recorder of interviews, the unburnt, the unbroken, and asker of questions like "What attracted you to the project?" — has chronicled its production. Which is nice of us.

58 FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS
Empire spends quality time with New Zealand's finest export since the hobbits.

66 THE WOMAN KING
Viola Davis and director Gina Prince-Bythewood on their historical epic.

72 SCOTT ADKINS
Never mind The Stath: there's a British action hero who could kick the sharp bit off a pencil, and he deserves to be celebrated. And not just because we're afraid of him. So say hello to Scott Adkins, the king of the B-movie beat-'em-ups.

80 ANDOR
House Of The Dragon isn't the only major prequel coming to a small screen near you: Tony Gilroy and Diego Luna have reteamed to bring you the further adventures of the roguest one from *Rogue One*, and we asked them all about it.

86 GODS AMONG US
No actor in history has grossed more at the worldwide box office than Samuel L. Jackson (yes, that wordless cameo at the end of *Avengers: Endgame* totally counts). No actor delivers a meaner monologue. No actor is cooler. All hail Sam the man.

Above: Here be dragons (just off-screen) — inside the *Game Of Thrones* prequel. **Below:** In the pink: *Inside Out*'s Bing Bong.



ON SCREEN

32 NOPE
Does Jordan Peele's latest get a 'yep' from us?

35 PERSUASION
It's, like, so Jane Austen.

46 BLACK BIRD
The Taron Egerton Apple+ show. Not to be confused (they hope) with the Michael Flatley action movie, which is somehow a real film that exists.

REVIEW

94 EVENT HORIZON
Twenty-five years on, Paul W.S. Anderson on his cult horror. Do you see?

98 TERENCE DAVIES
A bittersweet interview with a British legend.

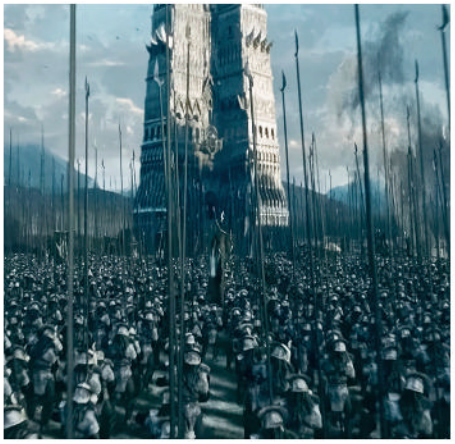
104 THE RANKING
The films of Sam Raimi. Groovy.

Spine lines issue 404: Newsstand: "My avatar gets the egg because I'm the only one here with the balls to run this place" is from *Ready Player One*. Subs: "You are not allowed to use iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, iTunes, Netflix, Pandora, or Spotify." is from *This Is 40*.


THE
EMPIRE
FILM PODCAST
HOLLYWOOD'S BIGGEST NAMES.
EMPIRE'S AWARD-WINNING PODCAST.
NEW EPISODE EVERY FRIDAY
EMPIREONLINE.COM/PODCAST
BANGILY
BANG!

TALK TO US

COMMENT OF THE MONTH



PEDANT POWER

Nick de Semlyen stated, in jest, that we may see Saruman apply for a building permit for Orthanc in the *Rings Of Powers* TV series. But it is my pedantic duty to inform him that Orthanc was built by the Númenóreans towards the end of the Second Age, and Saruman only came to Middle-earth 1,000 years after the Third Age had begun and was given the keys to Orthanc in 2759 of the Third Age.

JAMES WEBBER, VIA EMAIL

We stand nerdily corrected! As someone once said, the time will soon come when pedants will shape the fortunes of all. James, for your wizard-level quibble, have a Picturehouse membership on us.

Picturehouse *Empire*'s star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the flagship Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.

COOKING FINDS A WAY

It was bootiful to see those *Jurassic World Dominion* dinosaurs and us humans finally co-existing in peace and harmony on our planet. Just as we rightly respect and treat the Earth's other animals, I can say that I for one would gladly offer those gargantuan, majestic, fleshy creatures a happy home on my farm, particularly that WTF massive dino chicken... Well, let's be honest: who could say no to Diplodocus dippers, T-Rex twizzlers or Raptor drummers!

DAVID WARWICK, VIA EMAIL

Very much looking forward to the next logical step of the Jurassic World *franchise: as a semi-final cooking challenge on* MasterChef: The Professionals.

THE MEASURE OF HOW MUCH I LIKE YOUR PODCASTS IS THAT I *SOLELY* HAVE THE SPOTIFY APP INSTALLED FOR THE SPOILER SPECIALS. THAT GOOD.

@JOHNNY_REILLY-

ON THE BEST FILMS OF THE YEAR SO FAR: ABSOLUTELY ZERO CONTEST FOR ME; THE STAND-OUT IS CLEARLY *EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE*. I LAUGHED, I CRIED, I WAS LEFT IN AWE. EASILY ONE OF THE BEST, AND MOST CREATIVE, FILMS I'VE SEEN IN A LONG DARN TIME.

LIAM MJ HARRISON

PIG FICTION

After Quentin Tarantino confessed his admiration for a certain cartoon, he needs to make a *Peppa Pig* film. We want a Mexican stand-off over a missing carrot. We want Samuel L. Jackson as Daddy Pig. Quentin, you read *Empire*. Over to you.

NEIL RENTON, EDINBURGH

QT, if you're reading this, you need to split merchandising costs for the first R-rated Peppa Pig *adaptation between yourself,* Empire *and Neil. Get your people to speak to our people.*

CONTACT US VIA:

EMPIRE MAGAZINE, ACADEMIC HOUSE, 24-28 OVAL ROAD, CAMDEN, LONDON, NW1 7DT

LETTERS@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM / @EMPIREMAGAZINE (#EMPIRELETTERS) / FB.COM/EMPIREMAGAZINE

EMPIRE

Editor
NICK DE SEMLYEN

Creative Director
CHRIS LUPTON

Photography Director
JOANNA MORAN

Deputy Art Director
MIKE CATHRO

Features Editor
ALEX GODFREY

Reviews Editor
JOHN NUGENT

News Editor
BETH WEBB

Associate Editor (Production)
LIZ BEARDSWORTH

Executive Editor
CHRIS HEWITT

Editor-In-Chief (Digital)
JAMES DYER

Deputy Online Editor
BEN TRAVIS

Social Media Editor
SOPHIE BUTCHER

Editor-At-Large
HELEN O'HARA

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Ian Freer, Boyd Hilton, Dan Jolin, Bill McConkey, Ian Nathan, Kim Newman, Nev Pierce, Paul Shipper, Adam Smith, Amon Warmann

CONTRIBUTORS
Words: Nicola Austin, Neel Bhatt, Kambole Campbell, Lillian Crawford, Tom Ellen, Hanna Flint, Al Horner, Ella Kemp, Jordan King, Michael Jones, Weiting Liu, Richard Newby, Christina Newland, Priscilla Page, David Parkinson, Olly Richards, Amelia Tait
Photographers: Hamish Brown, Dean Mackenzie, Marco Vittur
Illustrations: Arn0, Chris Bianchi, Neil Edwards, Jacey, Christopher Lee Lyons, Bill McConkey, Russell Moorcroft
Design: Russell Moorcroft
Subbing: Julie Emery, Matt Yates
Picture assistance: Giuseppe Frusteri

H BAUER PUBLISHING
CEO of Bauer Publishing UK **Chris Duncan**
EA to CEO **Vicky Meadows**
EA to CFO **Stacey Thomas**
Group MD — Women's Mass & Celebrity, Premium And Entertainment **Helen Morris**
Publisher – Premium And Entertainment **Lauren Holleyoake**
PA to Group MD and Publisher **Elisha Thomas**
Chief Financial Officer, Bauer Magazine Media **Lisa Hayden**
Business Analyst **Alison Bennett**
Managing Editor **Linda Steventon**

MARKETING
Marketing Manager **Susan Litawski**
Subscriptions Marketing **Leah Roberts** 01733468366
Newstrade Marketing Manager **Karen Caruso**

PRODUCTION
Print Production Controller **Carl Lawrence** 01733-468858
Ad Production Controller **Jackie Doran** 01733-468107
ePublishing Production Director **Alan Kindell** 020-7859 8604

ADVERTISING
Head Of Magazine Media **Clare Chamberlain**
Head Of Magazine Brands **Anu Short**
MD — Bauer Media Advertising **Simon Kilby**
Brand Director **Joel Stephan** 020 3879 2125
Head Of Film **Sarah Clarke** 020 7295 3576
Film Account Director **Louise Williams** 020 3879 2189
Senior Display Executive **Sian Hogan** 020 3879 3394
Regional Sales Manager **Katie Kendall** 020 7295 8560
Sales Operations Co-ordinator **Talys Andres** 01733 366342
Head Of Classified **Ben Peck** 01733 363206
Classified Sales Executive **Max Garwood** 01733 366405
Inserts Manager **Simon Buckenham** 020 7075 0812

SUBSCRIPTIONS, BACK ISSUES AND OVERSEAS SALES
To ensure you don't miss an issue visit www.greatmagazines.co.uk.
To contact us about subscription orders, renewals, missing issues or any other subscription queries, please email bauer@subscription.co.uk or call us on 01858 438884, or if overseas call +44 1858 438884.
To manage your account online visit www.greatmagazines.co.uk/solo
To order back issues please call our UK number on 01858 438884, or if overseas call +44 1858 438884

INTERNATIONAL & SYNDICATION
syndication@bauermedia.co.uk

COMPLAINTS
H Bauer Publishing is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (www.ipso.co.uk) and endeavours to respond to and resolve your concerns quickly. Our Editorial Complaints Policy (including full details of how to contact us about editorial complaints and IPSO's contact details) can be found at www.bauermediacomplaints.co.uk

Empire is published every four weeks by H Bauer Publishing. No part of the magazine may be reproduced in any form in whole or in part, without the prior permission of H Bauer Publishing. All material published remains the copyright of H Bauer Publishing and we reserve the right to copy or edit any material submitted to the magazine without further consent. The submission of material (manuscripts or images etc) to H Bauer Publishing, whether unsolicited or requested, is taken as permission to publish that material in the magazine, on the associated website, any apps or social media pages affiliated to the magazine, and any editions of the magazine published by our licensees elsewhere in the world. By submitting any material to us you are confirming that the material is your own original work or that you have permission from the copyright owner to use the material and to authorise Bauer to use it as described in this paragraph. You also promise that you have permission from anyone featured or referred to in the submitted material to it being used by H Bauer Publishing. If H Bauer Publishing receives a claim from a copyright owner or a person featured in any material you have sent us, we will inform that person that you have granted us permission to use the relevant material and you will be responsible for paying any amounts due to the copyright owner or featured person and/or for reimbursing H Bauer Publishing for any losses it has suffered as a result. Please note, we accept no responsibility for unsolicited material which is lost or damaged in the post and we do not promise that we will be able to return any material. Finally, whilst we try to ensure accuracy of your material when we publish it, we cannot promise to do so. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss or damage, however caused, resulting from use of the material. Transparencies and any other material submitted for publication are sent at the owner's risk and, while every care is taken, neither *Empire*, nor its agents, accept any liability for loss or damage. Although *Empire* has endeavoured to ensure that all information in the magazine is correct, prices and details may be subject to change. *Empire* is a trademark of H Bauer Publishing. • If you can't find the magazine in the shops, call Frontline on 01733 555161. Magazine printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Way, Willenhall, Wolverhampton, WV13 3XA. • Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation. H Bauer Publishing is a company registered in England and Wales with company number LP003328, registered address Academic House, 24-28 Oval Road, London, NW1 7DT. VAT no. 918 5617 01. H Bauer Publishing is authorised and regulated by the FCA (Ref No. 845898). This issue on sale 4 August.

"How do you say pooh-pooh?"

THE LOVE OF CINEMA

DID YOU KNOW PICTUREHOUSE CINEMAS HAVE THE UK'S LONGEST RUNNING CINEMA PODCAST?

The perfect cinema-going companion, each month our hosts discuss the best new films and talk to some of our favourite filmmakers.

Find it wherever you get your podcasts.

SCAN TO LISTEN

PICTUREHOUSES.COM/PODCAST

Picturehouse | KIA Movement that inspires | STRIPPED MEDIA

THE ULTIMATE EMPIRE EXPERIENCE

There are now more ways to enjoy Empire than ever before. Pick the membership option that suits you best, to enjoy discounts, rewards and exclusive bonus content.

DIGITAL MEMBERSHIP

£3.99/month

- Instant access via the new Empire app on your mobile or tablet
- Includes access to previous issues
- Exclusive rewards
- Listen to selected premium articles
- Fortnightly Empire Insider email newsletter
- Control your digital reading experience with night mode, adjustable font size and more



CHOOSE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERS.EMPIREONLINE.COM/MEMBERSHIP

Terms & Conditions: *We can currently offer Empire VIP Club to UK customers only. Memberships will start with the next available issue. Prices quoted apply when paying by recurring payment. One-off payments also available — see website for prices. The minimum term is 13 issues. After your first 13 issues your membership will continue at this offer price unless you are notified otherwise. You will not receive a renewal reminder and the recurring payments will continue to be taken unless you tell us otherwise. This offer closes on 31/12/22 and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. To redeem cinema rewards, new members will receive a welcome email from Great Magazines confirming their purchase and a unique code to claim their chosen reward via a Picturehouse or Cineworld URL. Cost from landlines for 01 numbers per minute are (approximate) 2p to 10p.

PRINT + DIGITAL PACKAGE

£5.20/month

- All the benefits of our digital membership
- 13 issues of Empire print magazine each year
- FREE UK delivery
- Collectable subscriber-only covers



VIP CLUB MEMBERSHIP

£7.99/month

WORTH OVER £130

- 12-month **Picturehouse** OR **My Cineworld Plus** membership with two free cinema tickets included*
- Exclusive live and online events
- FREE access to every episode of the Empire Spoiler Special Podcast, worth £32.99 a year

+

- PRINT MEMBERSHIP
- DIGITAL MEMBERSHIP



OR BY PHONE QUOTING GPOC

01858 438884

SCAN USING YOUR SMARTPHONE CAMERA

GREAT MAGAZINES.CO.UK

TAKE 20

THIS MONTH'S FILM MOMENTS THAT MATTER

[EDITED BY BETH WEBB]



No./1

Gangs Of London takes a bigger swing

Showrunner CORIN HARDY on how he's taking the breakout crime drama to a brutal new level

CORIN HARDY'S CAREER as a director so far has been filled with all kinds of murderous mayhem. From child-snatching goblins in *The Hallow* to demonic sisters of the cloth in *The Nun*, Hardy has served up enough blood to keep Castle Dracula in business. So, when he sits back and reflects on the claret-soaked chaos he's about to unleash in the second season of *Gangs Of London*, and then worries that he's possibly gone too far, the mind fairly boggles. What the hell has he got in store this time?

"I love blood," laughs Hardy, sitting down with *Empire* in a London post-production house. "Blood is such an important colour to use in the canvas of action. You get this immediate reaction when you see it." But when he sat down to watch the final version of a sequence set in a launderette, even this hardiest of Hardys baulked somewhat. "Some of this stuff, you plan it, you choreograph it, you storyboard it, pre-viz it, shoot it with stuntmen and actors, edit it, and by the time you've got your final sequence, only then do you see what you've made. And I sat back and watched it and thought, 'I've gone too far this time.'"

Grounds for concern for Hardy, but grounds for encouragement for the rest of us. The first season of *Gangs Of London*, which depicted the hyper-violent clash between the capital's criminal consortiums, raised the bar for action on the small screen, and introduced Ṣọpẹ́ Dìrísù as undercover cop Elliot Finch, an all-punching, all-kicking anti-hero for the ages. But that was under the auspices of Gareth Evans, director of *The Raid*, and the show's co-creator. Not only did





Evans direct several of the early episodes, including the stunning siege set in and around a Welsh farmhouse, but he oversaw the action choreography. But with Evans choosing to move on to direct his new Netflix cop thriller *Havoc*, the way was clear for Hardy, who directed several Season 1 episodes, including the finale, to step up to the position of showrunner.

"It's been a daunting and very exciting challenge, because Gareth is the best action filmmaker in the world, probably," says Hardy. "But I have always loved action and genre, and wanted to put my stamp on it." Hardy suspected that the show's appeal boiled down to its blend of action and genres, from Asian cinema to Westerns, and ahead of shooting Season 2, he concocted a list of set-pieces, characters and weapons, ensuring that none were a repeat from Season 1.

Among those set-pieces are a terrifying home-invasion sequence which sees one character stalked by a group of masked men, and the aforementioned fight to the death between two characters (one of whom is played by the actual world's strongest man) in a launderette.

And last but by no means least, as shown in the main picture above, is a rip-roaring rampage which takes Elliot (now, one year after the events of the first season, an enforcer for the mysterious organisation pulling the strings of the various gangs) through a Korean karaoke bar known as a '*noraebang*'. "It's a sequence I can't wait for people to see," adds Hardy. "It's quite musically driven. I've always been inspired by Asian cinema and Korean revenge movies and karaoke, and I wanted to do a bit of a homage to these things." With Elliot getting in way over his head, with faces old and new assisting and assaulting him from all sides, Season 2 promises to be a blood-soaked belter. "Too far" might just be the year's hottest destination. **CHRIS HEWITT**

Main: Smashing it: Sope Dirisu turns for the second series as maverick undercover cop Elliot Finch. **Above:** Director Corin Hardy (left) demonstrates his gun technique on set.

GANGS OF LONDON **SEASON 2 IS ON SKY ATLANTIC AND NOW**



No./2

Why Peter Farrelly went to war

In THE GREATEST BEER RUN EVER, the *Green Book* director heads to the violent depths of Vietnam

PETER FARRELLY IS not, he is at pains to point out, Rob Reiner. Farrelly, whose new war drama *The Greatest Beer Run Ever* arrives in the wake of his Oscar-winning *Green Book*, hails the versatility of Reiner, a director whose first four films, from *Stand By Me* to *The Princess Bride*, proved that he could take on any genre. "We just did a series of comedies, as those were the ideas that came to us," he says of his and his brother Bobby's body of work, which includes *There's Something About Mary* and *Dumb And Dumber*.

Yet the past four years have seen Farrelly pivot into the "anything" category. *Green Book* — a 1960s-set true story about racial tension in the Deep South — won Best Picture and Best Screenplay at the 2019 Academy Awards. But he still sees *Green Book* and now *The Greatest Beer Run Ever* as a continuation of, rather than a departure from, his former filmmaking career. "I never made a movie where I wondered if I should be making that movie," he says. "I always 100 per cent believe that this is the movie for me. I'm not always right, but I feel at the time that I am."

With *Beer Run*, that feeling started when he saw a documentary adapted from a book based on John 'Chickie' Donohue's journey into Vietnam in 1967 to hand-deliver beer to his buddies in combat. "I thought, 'That's a home run. I love that story,'" Farrelly remembers. Played by Zac Efron, Chickie — a US Marine Corps veteran — finds his faith in the war slipping as he witnesses atrocities. Farrelly was ten in 1967, and remembers following his parents' positive attitude towards the coverage that he was watching on the news. "It wasn't until the mid-'70s, when I'd grown into a teenager, that I started seeing the stupidity of war."

The film's message rings out in one particular scene, in which Chickie playfully throws a ball back to a lone, young Vietnamese girl. To his horror, she becomes instantly, tearfully terrified,



Clockwise from main: Zac Efron as John 'Chickie' Donohue with Jake Picking as Rick Duggan; Donohue with war photographer Coates (Russell Crowe); Director Peter Farrelly; Efron's character is based on a real-life Marine.

and is whisked away by her mother. "That was something that really happened," explains Farrelly, who removed the sound from the scene in favour of a haunting 1960s track — 'I'd Like To Walk Around In Your Mind' by Vashti Bunyan. "It's almost like watching Charlie Chaplin in the middle of Vietnam," he reflects. "It's this guy motioning to her; you know what he's saying, you know it's not working."

The film, which stars Bill Murray and Russell Crowe in supporting roles, is set to test Efron's range, as a man increasingly, distressingly out of his depth. "I looked at him as John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*," says Farrelly of the character. "He means well and he's charming, but he's not always right and wants to be a better person." As a director who readily admits that he's not always right himself, perhaps Chickie's story was one that Farrelly was always destined to tell. Rob Reiner, move over. **BETH WEBB**

***THE GREATEST BEER RUN EVER* IS ON APPLE TV+ FROM 30 SEPTEMBER**





Getty Images



No./3 How Minions made the world go bananas

These small, yellow henchmen have sparked a worldwide following in its GentleMinions. *Empire* investigates the chaos

IT SOUNDS LIKE one of Gru's harebrained schemes. In 2010's *Despicable Me*, Steve Carell's loveable supervillain and his little yellow Minions plotted to steal the Moon. In 2022, the animated slapstick icons went even further: they stole the internet, with TikToking teens worldwide dressing in suits and flocking to cinemas in their droves to watch *Minions: The Rise Of Gru*.

"Who could've expected it?" says Pierre Coffin, who voices the Minions in the film (and directed the first *Minions*). "I think it's awesome that the movie is seen and appreciated by an unexpected age group."

The explosion of the 'GentleMinions' phenomenon left unsuspecting cinemas flummoxed. It began with a TikTok video, in which besuited teenagers rolled up in style to reverently watch and cheer for the ultimate cinematic event: the return of the Minions. Soon, everyone was doing it — some more respectfully than others, with banana-throwing antics and rowdy behaviour causing some UK cinemas to ban formally dressed youngsters.

Other GentleMinions were, well, gentler. "We didn't want to disrupt everything or ruin the experience. There were children that wanted to see the film," says 16-year-old Louis Jolin, who, along with six pals, recently donned suits and headed to Cineworld High Wycombe for *Rise Of Gru*. "It was a fun thing to do with the group. We didn't want to cause a scene —we just wanted to have a good time and take part." If there's undeniably a level of irony here, the trend erupted amid a generation who grew up on the franchise, dormant since 2017's *Despicable Me 3*. "It's part of our childhoods, and it's been so long, and suddenly this film comes out," Jolin explains. "As much as it is a joke, we did actually really enjoy watching it."

It wasn't just teens getting hooked. Kim Kardashian threw a lavish Minions-themed party at her house ("How cute is this slime?!" she asked her 325 million followers, filming a cup of yellow goop). Cult music producer Jack Antonoff's guest-packed soundtrack (led by a Diana Ross and Tame Impala collab) got audiophiles on board.

Maybe it's the sweltering heat, the relentless marketing, or some kind of intangible virality — but the entire world is Minion-mad once more. Jolin only has one word in explanation: "Banana." Who, really, can argue? **BEN TRAVIS**

***MINIONS: THE RISE OF GRU* IS OUT NOW**

Suits you, sirs: Teenagers worldwide are embracing the GentleMinions trend.



No./4

Top to bottom: Florence Pugh as Lib Wright; Pugh with Kíla Lord Cassidy as Anna O'Donnell; And with Sebastián Lelio on set.





Tearing up the costume drama playbook

THE WONDER director Sebastián Lelio on bringing a fresh perspective to a familiar genre

ON PAPER, *The Wonder* might seem like your standard period movie — bonnets, hardscrabble lives, Toby Jones with mutton chops. But *Disobedience* and *Gloria Bell* director Sebastián Lelio's latest promises a bold new take on the costume drama. First of all, adapted from *Room* author Emma Donaghue's 2016 novel, it has a crackerjack premise. In the 1850s, Lib (Florence Pugh), an English nurse, is summoned to an Irish village to preside over Anna O'Donnell (Kila Lord Cassidy), an 11-year-old girl who has survived without food for four months. Some view it as a medical anomaly, others see the girl as a miracle.

"Lib arrives and, as a rationalist, thinks she's going to uncover the hoax in ten minutes," says Lelio, talking to *Empire* in-between final mixing sessions. "She becomes more and more involved and deeply connects with the girl. By the time she understands what is really going on, she's prepared to do the wildest things for the love she feels for Anna."

Lelio describes the film as "partly a psychological thriller, as Lib is connecting dots and trying to uncover the problem." But at the heart of the drama is the intense, complex relationship between Lib and Anna. "That dual element was always going to be crucial in the film, the electricity that comes out of the collision between the two actors" says Lelio. "Florence is such a presence, that [whether] she could somehow be too strong for Kila was always a question. They made each other sweat."

The Chilean director wanted to avoid the "sad, unbearable version" of this story, so encouraged cinematographer Ari Wegner (*The Power Of The Dog*) to find "pleasure in the imagery, even if the themes are challenging and dark". Lelio also hints the film has a "meta" quality, a playfulness he attributes to his outsider status.

"If you're invited as a foreign filmmaker to make a period film in Ireland with a British production, I don't know if there is a stronger way to be out of your element," he says. "But I was also aware that the mixture of fresh eyes and irresponsibility could become an asset, because I don't carry the burden of tradition."

As such, Lelio, Donaghue and co-writer Alice Birch (like Pugh and Wegner, another *Lady Macbeth* alumnus) have come up with some cheeky postmodern devices that, unlike the *Fleabag*-imitating frippery of *Persuasion*, are baked into the DNA of the narrative. "It is a film about stories and the function of stories in our lives — how stories can trap us, or how we can use them to find new levels of freedom," says Lelio. "So, I wanted the film itself to have a certain self-awareness." Breaking the stone fourth wall. Bring it on. **IAN FREER**

***THE WONDER* IS ON NETFLIX LATER THIS YEAR**

TRAILER TALK

Clerks III

Unfiltered, uncensored, uncompromising trailer reactions from team EMPIRE

Ben Travis (Deputy Online Editor): I'm quite excited about this film. I'm always going to have an affection for Jay and Silent Bob and the View Askewniverse stuff. And the Dante and Randall stuff tends to be a bit more emotionally grounded.
Alex Godfrey (Features Editor): I have less hopeful thoughts about this film.
James Dyer (Digital Editor-In-Chief): Did you like *Clerks II*, Alex?
Alex: As a man of a certain age, I was obsessed with *Clerks*. It was like bottled lightning. Smith maxed out his credit cards to get the film made, and it had this incredible energy to it. It never warranted a bigger-budget sequels.
Beth Webb (News Editor): There's a Kevin Smith toilet at the Prince Charles Cinema in London.
Ben: What does this involve?
Beth: Just a lot of photos of Kevin Smith on the wall looking down on you.
Ben: Is there a sign on the door saying, "I assure you, we're open"?
Alex: I think there's a Tarantino cubicle as well.
Beth: I don't know which is more unnerving.
Ben: I really like that there's an autobiographical element to this film. When the first film came out, he was also working at a convenience store. Then the second one addresses a midlife crisis. Then Kevin Smith had a massive heart attack, and in this film Randall also has a heart attack.
Beth: Back at the old New Jersey store front, I see.
John Nugent (Reviews Editor): Is weed legal in New Jersey now?
Ben: I've just Googled, and it's legal for both medicinal and recreational use in New Jersey.
John: I wonder if that's putting Jay and Silent Bob out of business?
Ben: Well, in the Jay and Silent Bob reboot they were growing new strains of weed, so hopefully they're okay.
Beth: How old are Jay and Silent Bob now?
Ben: They must be in their late forties at least.
Sophie Butcher (Social Media Editor): I like how they reference Tinder to prove how modern they are.
Ben: The poster in the background there is for 'Eternity Blocker'. I think that might be a Cock Knocker nod, who was the villain Mark Hamill played in *Jay And Silent Bob Strike Back*. He has a massive hand and he punches everyone in the dick with it.
Alex: Is it just me or is Randal the spitting image of, what's his name, *Fantasy Football*...?













John: Frank Skinner?
Alex: He looks exactly like Frank Skinner.
Ben: He's got a Tintin quiff going on.
John: Do these guys do much acting outside of Kevin Smith's stuff?
Ben: Jeff Anderson didn't want to do *Clerks III* for a really long time. Like, he really couldn't be arsed to make it. And the original script that Smith wrote for it was much darker. The script after his heart attack is obviously much different. I'm really glad they've done it this way.
Beth: I think I'd prefer dark and angry *Clerks III*.
John: He's always got to have Baffles.
Beth: Oh God. Oh no.
Sophie: Is that a regular thing?
Alex: Yes, he was in *Mallrats*, *Chasing Amy*...
Beth: He was in *Dogma* with Alan Rickman, who played a genital-less angel.
Alex: And there's Sarah Michelle Gellar! That's the first time I've seen her on screen in about ten years.
John: Is that not Maria Bamford?
Beth: I would bet my life on that being SMG.
John: He's breaking the fourth wall there and looking directly at the camera.
Ben: There's a lot of fourth-wall-breaking in these films.
Alex: They didn't with *Clerks* though, and that's what unsettles me. It's all become a big in-joke.
Beth: I couldn't tell you how old Jason Mewes is. I'm looking it up... he is 47. That is wild to me. He has not aged a day from the first *Clerks*.
Ben: Justin Long, just glad not to be sewn into a walrus suit like he was in *Tusk*.
John: Of course, he's reunited with Kevin Smith after they both starred together in *Die Hard 4.0*.
Beth: I think he knows his demographic by getting these big '90s and early '00s stars in.
Alex: I just think these are the people who will say 'yes' if he makes the call.
Beth: You really hate *Clerks III*, don't you, Alex?
Alex: I do have a real soft spot for Kevin Smith.
Beth: You've got a funny way of showing it.
Alex: I don't mean to be so down on it. I hope that it's good and that it's funny. I've just been hurt in the past.
John: I think there are plenty of deep cuts that Kevin Smith fans, like Ben Travis, will really appreciate. I'm not one of those nerds, but I'll happily allow it for the Bens of the world.

CLERKS III DOES NOT YET HAVE A UK RELEASE DATE



No./5

How Baby Groot found his roots

I AM GROOT gives the seedling with a small vocab his own TV show

WITH JUST THREE words ("I am Groot") and a strip of bark to work with, *Guardians Of The Galaxy*'s Groot isn't the most obvious candidate for his own spin-off. But through a new five-strong series of short films for Disney+ (set before the first *Guardians Of The Galaxy* movie), directed by Kirsten Lepore and with Vin Diesel returning to voice his character in child form, he's got just that. Speaking with *Empire*, Lepore reveals the stages of turning Baby Groot into the hero of his own story.

GET WEIRD

Lepore, who formerly worked on Cartoon Network's surreal animated show *Adventure Time*, delighted in bringing her off-kilter sensibilities to a Marvel favourite. "As much as it's still Groot and he's still cute, he's also a little bad baby who's very mischievous," she explains. Each of the five shorts uses a quintessential childhood experience — bath time, dress-up, drawing — as a starting point. "Then we'd just go wild and make it weird and rude and sci-fi. It was a really fun sandbox to play in." The series, confirms Lepore, will be a tonal departure for the studio. "There aren't a lot of comedy shows on the Marvel animation roster, so even though they are shorts, we really got to play up how funny they are."

PICK THE RIGHT TUNES

Unlike Peter Quill, this Guardian doesn't have his own official mixtape, but *I Am Groot* still promises plenty of sweet needle-drops. Where *Guardians* included popular American tracks largely from the '60s and '70s, the show stays in the same era but goes global. "We have a lot of sounds from Brazil, sounds that are inspired by African music, we have a Jimmy Cliff track in there," says Lepore. "Then there's some electronic music, and some analogue stuff."

TALK TO JAMES GUNN

Lepore spent time with Gunn ahead of making the show, discussing the essence of Groot. "Something he said that stuck with me is that Groot is an emoji guy," she remembers. "All he's got are two eyes and a mouth." The simple nature of Groot's face, Lepore explains, are what makes him relatable, whether he's chomping down candy or shooting down bad guys: "It's the bare minimum of what you need for a lot of expression." Gunn's involvement in the show didn't end there either: "He may have a voice Easter egg in one of our episodes."



Clockwise from left: Baby steps — Groot gets his own spin-off series; Is his bark worse than his bite? Vin Diesel returns as the voice of Groot.



BRING IN BACK-UP

As the poster for the show's short 'Magnum Opus' reveals, Groot is working on a crafts project with glue, scissors, and what appear to be cheesy puffs. "I will say he maybe pilfers some things from some of his fellow Guardians who may or may not make an appearance, to create something really big and really wonderful," says Lepore. With Bradley Cooper's Rocket Raccoon already confirmed as a cameo, things are looking positive. The director has also created some brand-new creatures — including some four-eyed, Tic Tac-looking aliens with flippers — to become a part of the MCU. Hopefully the Guardians will be hiring some new recruits for *Vol. 3*.

NEEL BHATT

***I AM GROOT* IS ON DISNEY+ FROM 10 AUGUST**



No./6

Meet the new dungeon masters

The filmmakers behind Dungeons & Dragons: Honour Among Thieves on striving to make a movie the game deserves

ASIDE FROM ITS huge influence on (and appearances in) *Stranger Things*, the fantasy role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons has never played well on the screen. There was that cheesy '80s kids cartoon, then in 2000 the eponymous big-screen box-office flop. And let's not even get started on the straight-to-DVD films that followed.

Writer-directing duo John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein (whose last film was, appropriately, *Game Night*) are well aware of all this. "We take it as a challenge," says Goldstein. "In some ways it's a good thing, because people come in with low expectations and we get a chance to knock their socks off."

Daley and Goldstein both know and love D&D. Goldstein was "an early adopter" who, like Elliott in *E.T.*, insisted on joining his big brother's games during the early '80s. Daley played it on TV as lead geek Sam Weir in Judd Apatow's *Freaks And Geeks*. "All of us cast-members decided to play a campaign to become acquainted with it," he says. "I had no idea how creative it was."

When first approached about the movie, the pair saw the potential to not only get D&D right, but also do something different with fantasy. "D&D is the perfect opportunity to mix genres, because it is inherently comedic when you're playing, but it's also very serious. Your life is always at risk," says Goldstein.

The way they describe their film, it sounds like *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, but with swords and sorcery. "We have this rag-tag team that are forced together," explains Daley. That team includes Chris Pine as a lute-playing bard, and Michelle Rodriguez as a barbarian who, Goldstein says, is "very much the strength of the operation".

At the movie's start, he continues, "the two of them are in prison, because they were part of a group of thieves and got caught." This may or may not have something to do with Hugh Grant's character, a "narcissistic sociopath" who used to work with the pair, but now holds the grand title 'Lord of Neverwinter'.

Fan service is something the pair are handling carefully. "We were really cognisant of it to the extent of being true to the world and including some of the beloved monsters and places," says Goldstein, "but also of making a movie that would appeal to someone if they've never spent a moment thinking about D&D. There really is an emotional story at the core of this thing." In their hands, it sounds like this D&D adaptation will be far less a roll of the dice than its predecessors. **DAN JOLIN**

***DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES* IS OUT IN MARCH 2023**





Above: Game on: Simon (Justice Smith), Edgin (Chris Pine), Doric (Sophia Lillis) and Holga (Michelle Rodriguez). **Below, top to bottom:** Writer-directors John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein on set with some of the cast; Pine with Regé-Jean Page as Xenk.

No./7

"I'd love to return as Captain Phasma. That would be smashing"

[THE Q&A] **On a break from journeying between faraway worlds, GWENDOLINE CHRISTIE is bringing the heat in Peter Strickland's culinary nightmare *Flux Gourmet***

SHE HEROICALLY WIELDED a sword as Brienne of Tarth in *Game Of Thrones* and brandished a blaster as Captain Phasma in the *Star Wars* legacy sequels. Now, Gwendoline Christie is putting her sharp wit to ferocious use as the head of a 'culinary performance institute' in sensory comedy *Flux Gourmet*, her second team-up with *In Fabric* filmmaker Peter Strickland. Here she explains the film's 'sonic catering' concept, shares her hopes for a *Star Wars* spin-off, and tells *Empire* about her TV projects *The Sandman* and Tim Burton's *Wednesday*.



Flux Gourmet sees you reunited with Peter Strickland. Did he write the role for you?
Yes. I absolutely adored the script. My character is a woman who exists out of the usual confines of society. And she's a woman in a position of power: she's a patron, but she's also using those universal themes of sex, money and power to control creativity.

What's Peter like as a director?
Peter was so open to being collaborative. He wanted the costumes to be as operatic as possible. I haven't played incredibly flamboyant, traditionally feminine women at all, so it was interesting to stray into a different area. It's what I crave after being in *Game Of Thrones* for such a huge part of my life. I loved having an opportunity to work directly with the designer, who's also my partner, Giles Deacon.

The film features 'sonic catering', a type of music made using food...
It's a genre that exists and can transport you to different places and can be beautiful. I've always loved the sound in Peter's films, and the sonics are exquisite. That close attention to another dimension. It's divine in life to find out new things, particularly in this technological age we're living in, where perhaps information is everywhere.



Top to bottom: Christie is taking an "incredibly flamboyant" new direction; With Makis Papadimitriou in *Flux Gourmet*.

In _The Sandman_ you play an androgynous Lucifer. Did you approach the character as non-binary?
Well, Lucifer isn't human. That's ultimately it. Lucifer is a fallen angel, an energy. That's how Neil Gaiman described Lucifer to me and I think what we all wanted was to really get back to the heart of the comics, take something of that foundation, that essence, and bring that to life.

Are you a fan of comic books?
I have always enjoyed comic books. They take you into a totally different dimension and the quality of the writing and the artwork is often really exceptional.

There's a comic run about your _Star Wars_ character Captain Phasma: would you return if Lucasfilm adapted it for the screen?
I haven't read the comics but, I mean, it's *Star Wars*! I would absolutely love that. There was a template for a character that people got really excited about. It would be smashing if they felt that it was worthwhile to explore, along with some fabulous action.

You could always play as Captain Phasma in the _Lego Star Wars_ video game in the meantime.
This is the next step for me, because as a teenager I was quite obsessed with computer games, and I was quite good at them. I think it's time to revisit them because they could be everything I had initially wanted them to be. There are entire worlds out there [where] we can investigate our megalomania!

What can you tell us about your character Larissa Weems in Tim Burton's _Wednesday_ series?
I've undergone quite a transformation and loved every minute of it. Tim is one of our greats. A true auteur, and he's managed to achieve the impossible, which is colossal, iconic, mainstream success whilst maintaining artistic integrity.

Do you have a favourite Tim Burton film?
Ed Wood is just sublime. From the first time I saw it, I loved it.
HANNA FLINT

FLUX GOURMET IS IN CINEMAS FROM 30 SEPTEMBER

Gustavo Papaleo/Eyevine. Getty Images

No./8 Where *Stranger Things* goes next

Strap in for a major, multi-tentacled expansion of the Duffer-verse



THE FINAL SEASON

After those feature-length episodes in Season 4, the Duffer Brothers have already indicated in post-finale interviews that Season 5 will be different, with shorter, faster-paced episodes. And forget loads of set-up or new characters. Instead, the final run is all about our *Stranger Things* heroes trying to save Hawkins (and the world?) from the monsters of the Upside Down. The brothers have also promised to tie up all of the show's loose ends, from Vecna's fate to Nancy's love-life.

THE SPIN-OFF

Now that the world of *Stranger Things* has expanded past Hawkins, a spin-off was surely inevitable. However, the brothers say that the project will be "1,000 per cent different" from the original series, and not built around existing characters (rumours of a a Steve, Eleven or Dustin spin-off have all been squashed). The only person who seemingly knows for sure what it is: *Stranger Things* cast member Finn Wolfhard, who managed to correctly guess the story, surprising the Duffers.

THE STAGE PLAY

Vecna on Broadway? Yes, it could happen. The most surprising piece of Duffer Brothers news is that there's going to be a *Stranger Things* stage play. Produced by prolific Brit impresario Sonia Friedman, with Stephen Daldry (*Billy Elliot*) directing and a script by Kate Trefry, an experienced writer on the series, the play will "be set within the world and mythology" of *Stranger Things*. Considering there was a *Lord Of The Rings* musical in 2007, and the five-hour *Harry Potter* play is a global hit, maybe bringing the Upside Down to the stage isn't such a whack idea.

THE TALISMAN

The Duffers have lined up a bunch of projects for their Upside Down Pictures production company in partnership with Netflix, all inspired by the stories that they grew up with. Among them is a TV adaptation of Stephen King's novel *The Talisman* for Steven Spielberg's studio Amblin. Okay, so this isn't technically part of the *Stranger Things* universe — but there is a connection: it's the book Lucas is reading in Season 4 of the show, and follows a 12-year-old boy who moves between New Hampshire and an alternate world, The Territories, in search of a crystal that could save his mother from cancer. The project is textbook Duffers — the pair even pitched their Netflix hit as a Spielberg adaptation of the Stephen King book you've never read. **BOYD HILTON**



Above: Stranger things have happened — Steve, Dustin, Robin, Max, Nancy and Lucas could soon be taking to the stage. **Below:** Brotherly love: Matt and Ross Duffer.

[TREND REPORT]

No./9 LIAM NEESON CAMEOS

It seems you can't swing a lightsaber these days without hitting the stalwart Irish actor

WORDS **BETH WEBB**
ILLUSTRATIONS **BILL McCONKEY**



CHIEF INSPECTOR BYERS

DERRY GIRLS

The final season of the Troubles-set comedy sees Neeson bite off more than he can chew while interrogating the spunky, outspoken girls (and the wee English fella).



HIMSELF

ATLANTA

In a surreal scene, Neeson addresses the controversial comments he made during a real-life 2019 press interview. As if that wasn't enough, his exchange with Paper Boi (Brian Tyree Henry) is in a bar called Cancel Club.



QUI-GON JINN

OBI-WAN KENOBI

Neeson's Qui-Gon Jinn appears in ghostly form for a quick chat. It's a sweet moment between him and Ewan McGregor, who hadn't shared the screen since 1999's *The Phantom Menace*. The Force stayed strong in these two, it's safe to say.



No./10

Inside the summer of surprises

With cinemas back in business and streamers booming, *Empire* reflects on the season that's kept throwing curveballs

MAVERICK WENT STRATOSPHERIC

Soaring into the $1 billion box-office club, a first for a Tom Cruise blockbuster, *Top Gun: Maverick* topped its iconic predecessor and exceeded all expectations. "This was exactly the kind of movie that reminded people why the cinematic experience can't be replicated at home," says box-office analyst Shawn Robbins. "The promise of real-world, practical action sequences added to its zeitgeist-capturing aura." Those gravity-defying stunts, potent camaraderie from not just Cruise but a young, action-thirsty ensemble of supporting actors, plus satisfying emotional pay-offs, proved that it wasn't speed we needed, but Maverick.

AN INDIAN EPIC HIT BIG

S.S. Rajamouli's 'Tollywood' (Indian Telugu-language) epic *RRR* is one of the summer's biggest success stories. Replete with pumped-up spectacle, including motorcycles used as weapons and a punch-up with a tiger, *RRR* not only debuted in second place at the UK box office, but went on to become the most successful Indian film of the year. Global demand to see *RRR* in cinemas — in spite of it being available on Netflix in major territories — has led to an extended theatrical tour known as the 'EncoRRRe'.

THE MCU WENT GLOBAL

Marvel saw new superheroes hail from Pakistan and Egypt this summer. May Calamawy stepped up as Scarlet Scarab,the MCU's first Arab superhero, in *Moon Knight*. Meanwhile, *Ms. Marvel*'s Kamala Khan (Iman Vellani) explored her Muslim lineage right back to the 1947 Partition, which led to the creation of India and Pakistan as independent nations. "It's a historic moment in culture, to get Marvel's first Muslim superhero," Kamala's creator, Sana Amanat, tells *Empire*. "It's telling this diasporic experience through metaphor."

THE MINIONS ROCKED THE HOUSE

Proving to be so much more than meme fodder, the Minions also inspired the unexpected smash-hit soundtrack for the summer. Under the curation of producer and musician Jack Antonoff, pop's finest gathered to celebrate these thumb-shaped yellow henchmen. Diana Ross teaming up with Tame Impala? St. Vincent covering 'Funkytown'? The Minions themselves belting



Illustration: Mike Cathro

out a rendition of Simon & Garfunkel's 'Cecilia'? This OST really had it all.

BRETT GOLDSTEIN'S GOD-TIER CAMEO

It's safe to say that absolutely nobody could have guessed that *Ted Lasso*'s favourite curmudgeon would be stepping up as Zeus' son in *Thor: Love And Thunder*'s post-credits sting. Here's hoping Hercules has the same potty mouth as Roy Kent.

'80s POP ROARED BACK

From Kate Bush's renewed chart success thanks to *Stranger Things* to the face-melting power of Guns N' Roses in *Thor: Love And Thunder*, icons from the 1980s are experiencing a serious revival. Bush, a self-professed *Stranger Things* fan, saw a 9,900 per cent boost in Spotify streaming in the US for 'Running Up That Hill' — which would also hit number one in the UK, a full 37 years after its first release — after it scored Max and Vecna's season-defining showdown.

ETHAN HAWKE BROKE BAD

The rakish romantic from Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy took a sinister turn with some seriously creepy performances. When he wasn't tormenting kids behind a devilish mask in Amblin-style horror (and $100 million box-office hit) *The Black Phone*, he was lining his sandals with crushed glass as cult leader Arthur Harrow in *Moon Knight*. This Gen X hero has become one nasty Gen Z villain.

ELVIS CREATED A NEW STAR

"Who?" was the question on many lips after it was announced that Anaheim, California native Austin Butler beat big names like Miles Teller and Harry Styles to the lead in Baz Luhrmann's sprawling musical biopic. Yet the 30-year-old soon put suspicious minds to rest with a breakout performance worthy of The King. "I tried to stay in it as much as I could for the entire process, so that way it didn't feel like I was clicking from Austin to Elvis," Butler tells *Empire*. "With awards talk already circling the performance, Butler looks set to have the Academy all shook up come March.

THE BOYS PROVED NOTHING WAS SACRED

Rivers of bodily fluids! Octopus fellatio! Tiny men entering other men's appendages in a weird sex act! The third season of Eric Kripke's depraved comic-book adaptation continued to push boundaries with its hyper-violent, hyper-sexual band of superheroes. With a spin-off and fourth season incoming, this streaming underdog was cemented this summer as one of the buzziest (and most eyebrow-raising) TV shows on air.

Above: Feeling hot, hot, hot! This summer season threw a succession of pleasant surprises at us, from Brett Goldstein's MCU debut to an unexpected Kate Bush revival (thanks, Vecna!).

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE DEFIED THE ODDS

In a summer saturated by sequels and spin-offs, one wildly ambitious action-comedy proved that you don't need to be tethered to a franchise to score big. The Daniels' fiercely kinetic multiverse caper, starring Michelle Yeoh at her best, is production company A24's highest-grossing film of all time, and lodged in the US box-office top ten for a 15-week stretch. Lucrative proof that more films should include fanny-pack fight sequences. **BETH WEBB**



No./11

A new spin on a baseball classic

Co-creator/star Abbi Jacobson on her TV reimagining of A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

THIRTY YEARS AFTER Penny Marshall's World War II baseball movie hit big screens, *A League Of Their Own* receives a fresh, serialised reimagining that opens up the world of its all-female ensemble."From the beginning, we're leaning into the stories that were not really told," says Abbi Jacobson, who co-created the show and stars in it as hopeful player Carson. "There's a nod to them in the film — we're doing a backflip into them."

Included in those stories is the deepening friendship between Carson in the show, and Max (Chanté Adams), a talented Black player who, in 1943, is fighting to get on the pitch. In the film, a single scene touches on the divide between Black and white women playing the game. In the show, however, Max is a key player, inspired by three real women of the time: Toni Stone, Mamie Johnson and Connie Morgan, who went on to play in the Negro Leagues with the men. "The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was this door that opened for white and white-passing women to play," Jacobson explains. "But what about women of colour? How does this incredible player find her team?"

The show is also packed with a spectrum of queer storylines shared amongst the characters, told within the confines of its 1940s setting, and introduced almost straight off the bat. "We would always ask, 'Why aren't there more nuanced, full, romantic stories like this?" says Jacobson. "We've also tried to present what it would've been like to be queer at the time. How secret it was, and how dangerous it could be."

The project might seem like a drastic change of pace for the *Broad City* co-star and co-creator; a sports ensemble show set against rapidly changing '40s America. Certainly travelling back to the era presented its challenges. "Some of the outfits were such a pain in the ass," Jacobson laughs. "I'll occasionally wear stockings in the winter, but I'm wearing stockings every single day on this show."

In spite of the era it's set in, there's a modern feel to the show; the dialogue doesn't feel dated, and the timeless female camaraderie is bolstered by an energetic, largely comedic cast including *The Good Place*'s D'Arcy Carden and *Famalam*'s Gbemisola Ikumelo. Some aspects of the show, however, didn't need updating, as a cameo from one of the film's original cast, Rosie O'Donnell, proves. "She didn't take much convincing to come on board," says Jacobson. "Rosie is such an important person in queer history, so to have her come and talk about that on set was a really special moment." It's through this celebration of the old while moving its story into the present day that puts this version of *A League Of Their Own* in a ballpark all of its own. **BETH WEBB**





Clockwise from main: Hand in glove — the women's baseball team in training; Rosie O'Donnell makes a cameo appearance; Tom Hanks and Madonna in the original movie.

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN IS ON PRIME VIDEO FROM 12 AUGUST

Allstar, Getty Images, Shutterstock, Marco Vittur

No./12

BONG JOON-HO HEADS OFF-WORLD

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT *MICKEY7*, THE DIRECTOR'S HOTLY ANTICIPATED FOLLOW-UP TO *PARASITE*



IT'LL TAKE YOU TO ANOTHER PLANET

"You've done well. Now rest. But don't rest for too long," Martin Scorsese warned Bong Joon-ho following his 2019 Oscar sweep. He didn't need to worry, because the South Korean filmmaker is about to embark on what might be his most ambitious venture yet, an interplanetary adventure based on Edward Ashton's 2022 novel ***Mickey7***. The film — set to shoot soon at London's Leavesden Studios — is partly set on a frozen world (think *Snowpiercer* but, well, snowier) that humankind hopes to colonise.

IT STARS ROBERT PATTINSON(S) IN CLONE FORM

Joining Bong alum Steven Yeun, Toni Collette and Mark Ruffalo on the film, Pattinson plays Mickey7, the sixth clone of a man named Mickey who has signed up for high-risk missions on the understanding that he'll die and be replicated. These suicide soldiers are also known as Expendables, though don't expect Sly Stallone to show up with a motley crew of mercenaries.

THERE'LL BE CLASS WARFARE APLENTY

Rich vs. poor is Bong's bread and butter, with class wars at the heart of *Parasite*, *Snowpiercer* and *The Host*. *Mickey7* is no exception. Lower-class recruits make up the Expendables on account of their disposability, and the novel promises a class conflict akin to *Parasite* as Mickey tackles superiors such as the villainous Commander Marshall.

EXPECT MONSTERS

Ashton's novel features aliens called Creepers, inspired by giant, centipede-like creatures in the animated series *Steven Universe* (the author watched the show with his kids). Bong's films are stacked with impressive creature design, from *The Host*'s toothy monster to *Okja*'s super-pigs, meaning the Creepers will likely be spectacularly formidable foes.

LILLIAN CRAWFORD



BLACK IN FOCUS

AMON WARMANN chews over the main moment in Black film and TV this month

IT'S TIME TO RECOGNISE THE GENIUS OF *HERCULES*' MUSES

THE NEWS THAT *Hercules* is the latest Disney animation to get the live-action treatment brings with it the possibility of reintroducing a group of pioneering characters back to the big screen: the Muses.

Hercules already has a lot going for it with its colourful animation, smart humour, and a superb co-lead in Susan Egan's Meg. But even now, 20 years after the classic 1997 film was released, the vocals of these five goddesses of the arts can't help but inspire a bout of toe-tapping, head-bopping joy.

Calliope, Clio, Melpomene, Terpsichore and Thalia — voiced by singers Lillias White, Vanéese Y. Thomas, Cheryl Freeman, LaChanze and Roz Ryan — were Disney's first depiction of Black female characters in a feature film. They're just as funny, positive and striking as their real-life counterparts. In doing so, their work is a celebration of Black culture that was quietly significant in the '90s, and the magnitude of their achievement has only become more impressive in subsequent years.

While each Muse is pleasingly distinct, the sweet music they create together is something truly special. Catchy, gospel-infused tracks like 'Zero To Hero' and 'A Star Is Born' ensure that the *Hercules* soundtrack can stand toe-to-toe with any album in Disney's impressive catalogue.



Greeks bearing gifts? The goddesses of the arts that a-Mused us in 1997's *Hercules* look set for a live-action big-screen reboot from director Guy Ritchie.

Their songs' lyrics lend to the group's light and joyful dynamic: "And then along came Zeus/He hurled his thunderbolt/He zapped/Locked those suckers in a vault." The Supremes-esque ensemble were also backed on occasion by all-Black session singers, plus Luther Vandross himself, who wanted to be a part of this historical milestone.

But the Muses don't just provide the bangers. They also serve as the film's narrators. Exposition can be tricky to make fun in animated projects — *Hercules* takes aim at Charlton Heston's more traditional and highbrow narrative style in its opening seconds — but the Muses quickly makes it something to look forward to. Their exuberant brand of elucidation is the perfect way to bridge the ancient with the modern, educating the audience on Greek myths with clever lyrics and soulful melodies.

Here's hoping that this remake, which comes courtesy of Guy Ritchie, does result in the Muses returning once more in all their glory. Failure to do so would be a colossal mistake. And that's the gospel truth.

CLASSIC PICK OF THE MONTH

20 FEET FROM STARDOM (2013)

This insightful doc uses a winning blend of archive footage and modern interviews to spotlight back-up vocalists such as Darlene Love and Merry Clayton, who have dedicated their careers to supporting huge artists and pop groups from Bruce Springsteen to the Rolling Stones. A tribute as entertaining as it is earned.





Main: Vera (Sunnyi Melles) starts to feel a tad queasy. **Below, top to bottom:** Oysters... are just asking for trouble; Winston (Oliver Ford Davies) 'enjoys' the view; Yeeuch!

No./13

The social satire that makes the rich retch

TRIANGLE OF SADNESS director Ruben Östlund on his gut-churning dinner scene







ONE KEY SEQUENCE in Ruben Östlund's Palme d'Or winner involves a horrifying medley of bodily fluids. On a super-yacht, the elite enjoy a swanky dinner, only to bring it back up as stormy seas take hold. Speaking with *Empire*, Östlund breaks down *Triangle Of Sadness*' outrageous set-piece.

THE INSPIRATION

Östlund was eating at an Italian buffet on a luxury cruise — part of his research for the film — when the idea of a tense, visceral sea-sickness sequence came to him. As strong waves rocked the ship, the filmmaker witnessed his fellow passengers falling silent. "You could see that people were dealing with this sickness at the same time as they were trying to use the right knife and fork," he tells *Empire*. To him, the clash of social etiquette with the primal need to vomit was fascinating. "There was a person throwing up in the dining room, and seeing people figuring out if they should leave or continue eating was really interesting."

THE PLANNING

The vomiting scene in *Monty Python's The Meaning Of Life*, in which Terry Jones' Mr Creosote continuously eats and throws up until he explodes, was a key reference for the sequence. "That was the one that we wanted to be better than. We really wanted to crush that scene," says Östlund. Of course, no great chundering sequence can take place without food, so a menu of carefully presented seafood was finessed, full of challenging textures for those riding choppy seas. "I wanted to include Swedish sour herring, which smells so bad that you can hardly be in the room with it," explains Östlund. "We served this on the last take so we could get the spontaneous, true reaction to it."

THE EXECUTION

The set was built on a gimbal, with cast and crew popping seasickness pills to endure rocking back and forth over a 12-day shoot. The cast were rigged up with button-activated contraptions, which could shoot rosehip soup out of their mouths on command. Some truly rose to the challenge, namely Sunnyi Melles as Vera, a wealthy passenger who, in one scene, fights a losing battle with an overflowing toilet. "She's actually the princess of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn," says Östlund of the actor. "She can make herself throw up spontaneously. She'd once been in a play where she had to throw up over 300 performances." Though she didn't draw on this skill for *Triangle Of Sadness*, she impressed the crew with her willingness to do take after take. "When you're well-connected in society you don't have to worry about losing face."

THE AFTERMATH

During the sequence's six-month editing process, Östlund became increasingly wary of how audiences may respond. "I was getting seasick myself," he admits. In spite of some screaming at the film's world premiere at Cannes, to date only one known audience member has had a physical reaction to the scene, "We had a screening in Sweden, and one person had to run out to throw up," recalls the filmmaker. Perhaps that's the secret to winning a Palme d'Or — sometimes you just have to pass the bucket. **BETH WEBB**

TRIANGLE OF SADNESS IS IN CINEMAS FROM 28 OCTOBER

Alamy, Photofest

No./14 NEXT IN THE SERIES



You fell in love with that incredible new TV show. And then it ended! Don't despair — Boyd Hilton recommends the sibling shows to watch next

IF YOU LOVED... THE BOYS



TIMELESS

(NETFLIX)

The Boys creator Eric Kripke has an extraordinary CV of TV sci-fi/fantasy series, from 15 seasons of *Supernatural* to the post-apocalyptic *Revolution* in 2012. This time-travel escapade he co-created in 2016 aired on E4 without much fanfare, and is unusual in the Kripke oeuvre for having a female lead. Abigail Spencer plays a history professor in charge of the team trying to track down a stolen time machine invented by an Elon Musk-ish tech billionaire, delightfully played by *Peep Show*'s Paterson Joseph. Each week features a fun trip to a different time period, but the show lasted for only two seasons.



POWERS

(iTUNES/PRIME VIDEO)

There have been many superhero-themed TV series in recent years, but this slightly obscure one from 2015 is the closest thematically to *The Boys*. It's set in a world where people with superpowers become celebrities who get up to no good, while Sharlto Copley is an ex-superhero-turned-detective who tracks down those who are abusing their powers. Almost as sweary and violent as *The Boys* itself, it has a fascinating supporting cast including Eddie Izzard, Michael Madsen and Noah Taylor.



VINYL

(SKY ON DEMAND/NOW)

The non-superhero character we're meant to identify with in *The Boys* is, of course, Hughie, played with aplomb by Jack Quaid. Prior to this breakout role, Quaid was best known for playing record-label dude Clark Morelle in this ambitious exploration of the '70s music industry in New York, which only ran for one season in 2016. The show was co-created by Martin Scorsese, Mick Jagger and Terence Winter, but was perhaps too insider-y to become a hit.



PREACHER

(PRIME VIDEO)

Before *The Boys*, the most effective attempt to translate the outrageous tone of Garth Ennis' comic books was this adaptation of his *Preacher* series, which ran for four super-violent, funny and visually spectacular seasons from 2015 to 2019. It stars Dominic Cooper as Jesse Custer, a dodgy Texan man of the cloth who suddenly attains the power to bend people to his will. He's joined on his amoral adventures by the superb Ruth Negga as hellraiser Tulip and Joseph Gilgun as pleasure-seeking Irish vampire Cassidy. Full of jaw-dropping set-pieces, it never quite had the cultural impact it deserved.

***THE BOYS* IS OUT NOW ON PRIME VIDEO**



No./15 Why India's *Forrest Gump* could run and run

What you need to know about the year's unlikeliest remake

IT'S A FAITHFUL REMAKE

Produced by and starring Hindi megastar Aamir Khan, who bought the rights to the original *Forrest Gump* from Paramount, *Laal Singh Chaddha* directly adapts Robert Zemeckis' Oscar-winning 1994 hit. In fact, many sequences are essentially a shot-for-shot remake, such as the famous "Run, Forrest, run!" scene (here translated as "Run, Laal, run!").

IT FOLDS IN INDIAN CULTURE

Remember, "Life is like a box of chocolates"? Here, it's, "Life is like a box of golgappas". And instead of Forrest's baseball cap, Laal wears a turban. While it stays largely true to the original, this is also fundamentally an Indian film, with Laal on the frontline at key points in the country's turbulent recent history.

IT WAS A HUGE PRODUCTION

Just as Forrest ran across America, so Laal runs across India. Filming took over two years and included over 100 locations, a record for a Hindi film. There was also significant digital tinkering to turn the 57-year-old Khan into a 20-something Laal.

IT COULD BE MASSIVE

After the unprecedented success of nutso actioner *RRR*, all bets are off for Indian cinema crossing over. With the memories of a familiar Western character bolstering this offering, there's a strong chance *Laal Singh Chaddha* could be another crossover hit over here. **JOHN NUGENT**

***LAAL SINGH CHADDHA* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 12 AUGUST**



No./16

The Hollywood tough guy who smashed the mould

[IN MEMORIAM] *Empire* contributor Christina Newland remembers the late, great JAMES CAAN

WHEN I INTERVIEWED James Caan late last year, over a long-distance phone call for *Empire*'s issue celebrating 50 years of *The Godfather*, it was apparent that the 82-year-old was experiencing poor health. Yet his condition didn't prevent him from uttering one of his signature, slyly witty remarks. As we tried to speak over a bad phone line, he quipped, "There's something between us, darling." Talking to him, even with a bad connection, was a thrill; before the call ended, he quipped: "Put a full-page ad out for me, honey. I could use the work."

In the movies, Caan always seemed too tough to die. With that New York baritone and delinquent walk, his square-jawed macho swagger, and his fit-to-burst volatility, who could ever get one over on this guy? Of course, *The Godfather*, the film that immortalised Caan, famously saw his character Sonny killed by rival gangsters. But Caan's performance contains so much more than one legendary death scene. Beneath his firecracker rage there is a quiet, familial tenderness; look at the way he casually slings an arm around his kid brother's shoulders, or, in a small flashback near the close of *The Godfather Part II*, launches out of his chair like he's on springs.

Born in the Bronx to a Jewish butcher in 1940, Caan spent his youth scrapping with other boys on the neighbourhood streets and helping out on his father's delivery truck. When he was 19, as he told it, his father learned while they were making deliveries one day that he was taking acting classes. Mr Caan was baffled, and his son was embarrassed.

But Caan worked his way up the Hollywood hierarchy. In 1969, his first film with Francis Ford Coppola — *The Rain People* — would help put him on the path to *The Godfather*. Given his working-class background, Caan was always plain-spoken about his desire to earn good money for himself and his family rather than put on airs about the films he chose to make. He told *Playboy* back in 1976, "No, I've never saved any money. I don't think that's what it's for. I like to live well and see my family and friends live well. That costs money. Fortunately, I make a lot of it."

His combination of machismo and brooding introspection would carry him through a number of remarkable roles: an ex-convict safecracker in Michael Mann's stylish *Thief*, a film with a tendril of doomed romance within that implies Caan's serrated performance has something softer within. In Karel Reisz's *The Gambler*, one of his finest roles, he plays a compulsive, self-punishing professor on a dark descent into gambling addiction. As Caan told me in our interview, "It was really one of my favourite character studies." He is equally committed to his part as an arrogant writer in *Misery* who is abducted and emasculated,







Clockwise from left: Behind the scenes on 1974's *The Godfather Part II*; In 1994's *The Gambler*; With Kathy Bates in *Misery* (1990); As *Elf*'s eternally grumpy Walter, alongside Daniel Tay and Will Ferrell.

an unusual foray into victimhood for the usually authoritative actor. And later on, he turned to comedy — albeit as *Elf*'s perpetually annoyed dad. He was often cast as an athlete or cowboy in his younger days: in real life, he excelled at football, baseball and martial arts.

Always a roaringly entertaining interview subject, Caan excelled at anecdotes — from playing chess with John Wayne on the set of *El Dorado* and his associations with real-life mobsters to his addictions, the man loved a good yarn. On Twitter in recent years, he thrilled a younger generation of film fans by sharing behind-the-scenes photos. His amusingly grandpa-ish 'end of tweet' sign-off became shorthand for his online presence. You could see the natural storyteller as a perfect extension of his work as an actor. He wanted you to pay attention, but he didn't have to tell you to. No-one who ever saw James Caan ever had to be told: you just watched, drawn in by his sheer force of personality. No full-page ad required.

Getty Images, MPTV, Shutterstock

No./17 The film that lured Julia Roberts back to the romcom



Ticket To Paradise director Ol Parker on working with a titan of the genre

EVEN WITH romcoms back on the rise, it would take something remarkable to lure Julia Roberts back to the genre after a 20-year hiatus. That something remarkable? George Clooney. Having confirmed in an interview that she would only return if a script as impactful as *Notting Hill* or *My Best Friend's Wedding* crossed her path, Roberts now reunites with her *Ocean's Eleven* beau for *Ticket To Paradise*, from director and co-writer Ol Parker.

"A huge part of the temptation for both was the other one," Parker tells *Empire* about bringing the pair back together for the first time since 2016 thriller *Money Monster*. Clooney, however, made the first move. "We sent the script to the pair of them at the same time. George said, 'This only works if it's me and Julia.' So he rang Julia and she was like, 'Oh my God — I thought the same thing.'"

The pair play long-divorced parents in the film, who travel to Bali in the hope of deterring their daughter (Kaitlyn Dever) from getting married and repeating their mistakes. The script was written with the pair in mind — the characters were even named Julius and Georgia in earlier drafts — with the *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* director mining their shared history on screen and off to create a story that felt like a continuation of a hypothetical romcom they made 25 years ago. "Sequels to romantic comedies are always crap because you don't want to see people struggling together," he says. "This film is about coming back together instead."

Parker and his co-writer Daniel Pipski turned to classic Cary Grant films such as *His Girl Friday* and *The Philadelphia Story* when writing the script. "They have more of a snap to them than more recent romantic comedies," says Parker.

He also made room for Roberts and Clooney to improvise. A playful Roberts made the decision to cover one of Clooney's eyes while his character takes drunken aim at a red plastic cup while playing beer pong. "Some really good jokes in the movie are hers," enthuses Parker. "There's a scene in which they jump up after they're discovered doing something, and for every single take she improvised a different line."

It may have taken 20 years, but the romcom queen is truly back, and on her own terms. **NICOLA AUSTIN**

***TICKET TO PARADISE* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 16 SEPTEMBER**

Above: Getting romantic — George Clooney and Julia Roberts in *Ticket To Paradise*. Below: Director Ol Parker.





No./18

SPOILER WARNING

How *Ms. Marvel* mutated the MCU

The finale's bombshells have major repercussions for Marvel's slate. Here's what could happen next

IF KAMALA KHAN could have watched the *Ms. Marvel* finale, she'd have freaked out. Because, being the biggest MCU fan there is (albeit one who literally exists *within* the MCU), she would have been the prime target for its double-whammy of revelations.

First came the news that Kamala's (Iman Vellani) friend Bruno (Matt Lintz) had found an oddity in her DNA — in his words, a "mutation" (accompanied by a musical flourish of the old *X-Men* animated series theme). Then, in a mid-credits sting, came a cameo from Kamala's idol, Brie Larson's Captain Marvel (aka Carol Danvers) — who appeared suddenly in Khan's bedroom just as our young hero is sucked into her wardrobe.

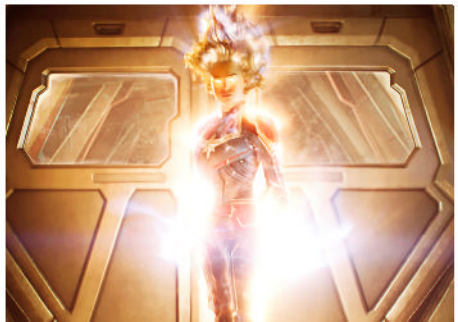
Have they somehow switched places, bringing Carol back to Earth and sending Kamala to who-knows-where? Or, as in the early pages of *Ms. Marvel*, has Kamala transformed herself into Carol? Expect answers next year in Nia DaCosta's *Captain Marvel* sequel *The Marvels*, teaming the duo up with Monica Rambeau (Teyonah Parris). In typical MCU style, the *Ms. Marvel* sting riffs on the comics without being a straight-up adaptation. "I'm happy we did a version of [Kamala transforming into Carol]. I was hoping we'd be able to get this in the show," says *Ms. Marvel* co-creator (and executive producer on the series) Sana Amanat. "It's a fun little wink to the comics, and a wink of what's to come."

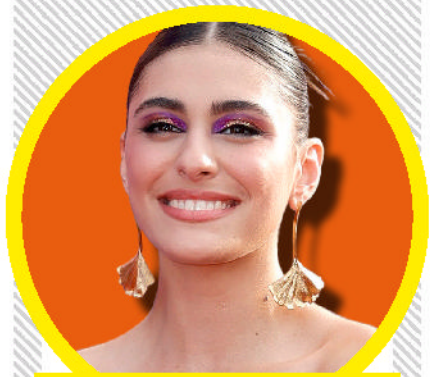
If that twist promises intriguing developments for *The Marvels*, so too does Bruno's mention of 'mutation' — a significant shift from Kamala's origins on the page, where she was an Inhuman. "We'd been talking about it for some time, trying to understand what is Kamala *actually*, in terms of what her background is?" says Amanat, telling *Empire* that she originally planned for Kamala to be a mutant in the comics too.

While 'mutation' signals a huge shift in the MCU to come — surely, the X-Men are coming soon — it's a revelation that's shrugged off by Kamala in the moment. "I love that last scene so much, because she says, 'Whatever it is, it's just another label,'" Amanat explains. "That was the whole point. It's like, 'Is she djinn? Is she Inhuman? And it's like, 'Actually, let's leave the door open and see what happens after it.' We're gonna play around with some more stories, hopefully, in the future." It's a future that looks even brighter than Kamala's Noor powers. **BEN TRAVIS**

Above: Girl power — Iman Vellani as Ms. Marvel. **Below, top to bottom:** Series co-creator and exec producer Sana Amanat (right) on set; Brie Larson as Captain Marvel.







INTRODUCING...

Yasmeen Fletcher

AS NAKIA IN *MS. MARVEL*, THE LEBANESE-AMERICAN ACTOR BRINGS HER OWN IDENTITY TO THE SCREEN

ON DISCOVERING MS. MARVEL

I got into the comics in 2018. A friend sent them to me and was like, "You would really relate to this." I absolutely adored Kamala and her story, and Nakia was my favourite character. When there were rumours of a show, I immediately emailed my manager and said, "I don't care where you can fit me in, but please fit me in somewhere. I need to be a part of this."

ON THEIR MARVEL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Spider-Man: No Way Home was shooting right next to us; our sound stages were 50 feet from each other. I could see the Captain America Statue Of Liberty, and without any context that was really weird. And there was lots of talk about Andrew and Tobey!

ON NAKIA'S MIXED HERITAGE

When I got the part, [*Ms. Marvel* co-creator] Sana [Amanat] said: "We want to make Nakia mixed Lebanese-American like you are, to make that feel super-authentic to you." That meant the world to me. In my family, there may have been comments made about being too white on one side or too ethnic on the other. Being able to say that on TV when I'd never seen the mixed experience spoken to onscreen was insane.

ON FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

I would love to work with Chloé Zhao. That's a really big one. I loved *Nomadland*. Working with Greta Gerwig and Wes Anderson would also be amazing.

HANNA FLINT

MS. MARVEL IS ON DISNEY+ NOW

No./19 There's still something about Cameron

With Cameron Diaz coming out of retirement after eight years away, we celebrate the return of a unique comedy force



Clockwise from top: The actor promoting *Annie* in 2014; *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*; *The Mask*; *There's Something About Mary*; *Shrek*'s Princess Fiona.

FOR THE BEST part of a decade, we have wandered a desert dry of Cameron Diaz's wide, goofy grin. Last seen as a modern-day Miss Hannigan in 2014's *Annie*, Diaz confirmed her retirement from acting in 2018, during an interview pegged to the anniversary of her comedy *The Sweetest Thing*. Even if you missed the announcement, it wasn't long before you missed her presence.

But now she's back. With the suitably named Netflix Original *Back In Action*, Diaz will make her triumphant return to comedy. The big news was announced on Twitter by the film's co-lead Jamie Foxx, who fondly referred to his *Any Given Sunday* collaborator as "the GOAT".

Though details of the project are light on the ground, it's all but guaranteed that we'll be treated to some trademark razzle-Diazlle — that unique blend of charm and flailing limbs, with a character who is as likely to tie her shoelaces together as she is to kick some ass.

Because the truth is, Cameron Diaz never quite got the kudos she deserved. Since her formidable debut in *The Mask*, aged just 21, she has seemingly never said "no" in the name of comedy. Take *There's Something About Mary*'s infamous hair-gel scene, where she plays it straight while sporting a wild, questionably coated quiff. Or her authentically excruciating, warbling karaoke rendition of Dusty Springfield's 'I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself' in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, which still manages to win the hearts of all who look on. She was joyously spiky in *Bad Teacher*. Even as Princess Fiona in *Shrek* she went toe-to-toe with two comedy stalwarts with a heartfelt, deftly funny voice performance. And yet at every turn, people underestimated her vibrant versatility and sheer comedic prowess. For shame!

How did Netflix convince Cameron Diaz to come out of retirement? Money, sure. But let's also hope they gave her a fat stack of flattery, too. Let's hope the entire boardroom hung their heads and said, "Rotten Tomatoes is sickeningly wrong about *Charlie's Angels*, one of the most unduly underappreciated masterpieces of our age."

But let's hope, above all, that Diaz's return isn't a one-off, but the beginning of a whole new era of her effortless, enthusiastic comedic delivery. A plethora of new comedy classics — and maybe even, if we're really lucky, *Charlie's Angels 3* — could be on their way. **AMELIA TATE**

No./20 When cinemas get (very) creative

When it comes to enticing moviegoers, some venues have a few cards (and monkeys) up their sleeves



FREE TICKETS FOR REDHEADS

During the UK's hottest ever two-day heatwave this July, Showcase cinemas offered free tickets to redheaded customers, who are more sensitive to high temperatures. Who needs sunscreen when you've got the big screen?



GLOW CONES

Like your ice cream with a dose of riboflavin? In 2014, a cinema-friendly (or not) glow-in-the-dark ice cream that omitted a B2-powered yellow glow was unleashed. With the aftermath looking like a Minion had exploded in your mouth, the jury's still out on this glacée gimmick.



TINY TICKETS FOR BIG MARVEL FANS

What is this, a movie ticket for ants? Well, yes. For *Ant-Man*'s release, a series of online clues led fans to 100 miniature IMAX tickets around London, with winners seeing the film for free. The promotion didn't extend to tiny snacks, alas.



CHIMPS GOING APE

A South Carolina cinema welcomed two chimps to a screening of *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes*. Vali and Sugriva bought their own tickets and paid for their own snacks. Here's hoping the film didn't give them any funny ideas. **BETH WEBB**

Illustration: Mike Cathro. Getty Images, Imax, Bompas & Parr

RAYMOND GUBBAY presents

SYMPHONIC UNIVERSE

A brand new show of epic music that is out of this world.

THE MUSIC OF

THE AVENGERS BATMAN BLACK PANTHER
THOR: RAGNAROK SPIDER-MAN STAR WARS
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY *and many more*

Ali Plumb *presenter* **Lee Reynolds** *conductor* **London Concert Orchestra**

SAT 3 SEPT	LONDON - ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL	7.30PM
SUN 16 OCT	GLASGOW - ROYAL CONCERT HALL	3.00PM
SUN 23 OCT	MANCHESTER - THE BRIDGEWATER HALL	3.00PM
FRI 28 OCT	BIRMINGHAM - SYMPHONY HALL	7.30PM

TICKETS: RAYMONDGUBBAY.CO.UK



OUT NOW
From the makers of car MAGAZINE

electric cars 2022

YOUR ESSENTIAL EV GUIDE

GET YOUR COPY AT

www.greatmagazines.co.uk/how-to-go-electric

PINT OF MILK

LEE PACE



ILLUSTRATION **ARN0**

What character were you in your first school play?
I was in *Oliver!* in high school as the undertaker. I went to school with Matt Bomer and he played Bill Sikes. At the end of the play, when his character was dead, we always tried to make each other laugh. If you had told us back then that we would still be doing this now, we wouldn't have believed you.

When were you most starstruck?
I was in my trailer on the set of *Twilight*, looking at myself in the mirror in these tight jeans, red contact lenses and Hot Topic jewellery, when my phone rang. This familiar voice said, "Hi, it's Julia." "Julia who?" "Julia Roberts." "Well, what can I do for you, Julia?" I had worked with Tarsem Singh on *The Fall* and she wanted to know about my experience working with him [Roberts was in *Mirror Mirror* for Singh]. We had the nicest conversation.

Which movie have you seen the most?
Labyrinth. I love it so much. I remember watching it on repeat when I had my wisdom teeth out in high school. Being on pain medication and hallucinating watching David Bowie twirl beautiful Jennifer Connelly around the goblin ball.

When were you last naked outdoors?
Very recently. I love being naked, so I will be if I get the chance and it's appropriate. Last time? A naked beach.

How much is a pint of milk?
About a dollar? Why are you surprised that I'm right? We have milk in America.

Have you ever written fan mail to anyone?
I wrote to the ThunderCats, because I was an admirer of their work, and asked to be trained as a member of their squad. I thought I could bring something to the team. I'm still waiting for a response. You don't see them reading a lot of letters on their show, so maybe that's why I haven't heard back.

What is your earliest memory?
When we lived in the Middle East. I remember the cat we had, Freddie. I remember my sister. I remember learning how to jump rope using a giant tree-root. I remember a beach outside the house where fishermen would bring their boats. If you swam, you had to be very careful not to step on urchins.

What's the worst thing you've ever put in your mouth?
It was in Western China, in the Szechuan Province. My host took me for a Szechuan hotpot. I love Szechuan pepper, but the volume of pepper was absolutely insane. I'm from Texas. I like spicy food, but I thought my head was going to explode.

COMING SOON

FOUNDATION: SEASON 2

(TBC)

Pace will return as Brother Day, the sinister emperor/clone in Apple TV+'s ambitious Isaac Asimov adaptation. With the new season said to span over a millennium, we could see a lot more of 'Intergalactic Emperor Daddy', as Pace's fans call him.

Do you have a signature dish?
It would just be leaves and tomatoes, or anything else grown in my garden, and steaks on the grill.

What is the worst smell in the world?
Dog farts. You look at them like, "Oh God, what have you just done?" And they just look at you like, "Yes, what?"

What is the best thing you've stolen from a hotel?
I didn't take anything, but when I was at school in New York, a friend and I thought it was fun to break into saunas in hotel spas at night, after we'd been drinking. So, we would sneak into the Peninsula Hotel or St. Regis and work out how to get into the sauna. All we stole was steam.

What's your most irrational fear?
Blades from circular saws. Ever since I was a child, I've had this recurrent image of those blades spinning and moving through space. Every once in a while, I'll get this flash vision of regular size ones and *massive* ones cutting through everything.

What's the strangest place you've thrown up?
I got food poisoning on one of my first jobs out of school. I was so sick during the whole day that they would put plastic trash buckets right under the desk where I was sitting. I remember needing to throw up during a take and quietly moving my head out of frame to vomit. I'm not sure why they didn't reschedule. **OLLY RICHARDS**

***BODIES BODIES BODIES* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 9 SEPTEMBER**

Gutter credit

ON SCREEN

5-26 AUGUST

BIG SCREEN. SMALL SCREEN. YOUR REVIEWS BIBLE STARTS HERE

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ OKAY ★★ POOR ★ AWFUL

[EDITED BY JOHN NUGENT]



[FILM]

NOPE

★★★★★

OUT **12 AUGUST** / CERT **15**
131 MINS

DIRECTOR Jordan Peele
CAST Daniel Kaluuya, Keke Palmer, Steven Yeun, Michael Wincott

PLOT Siblings OJ (Kaluuya) and Emerald Haywood (Palmer) inherit a Californian horse ranch from their industry-legend father. One day, they glimpse a mysterious object lingering in the sky above their abode. Attempting to capture the mystery on film, the two make horrific discoveries about the phenomenon's true nature.

IT'S OFTEN SAID that showbiz can eat you alive. Jordan Peele's third film runs with that metaphor further than anyone might have expected. For his latest sci-fi horror, Peele characterises the film industry as a ruthless beast, and wonders about who gets led into its jaws, and for whose benefit. In *Nope*, the audience itself becomes a vast monster, demanding to be entertained by personal and historical trauma.

The film makes visceral horror of the nightmare of being consumed by something unfathomably larger than you — whether that's by a national audience or a flying Lovecraftian terror. But it's also a celebration of film crew — those in the less glamorous roles fundamental to creating cinematic spectacle. Peele is no stranger to turning American pathologies into demonic monsters: *Get Out* found uncanny frights in white liberal racism via *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* and *The Stepford Wives*; while *Us* reimagined *C.H.U.D.* as a reflection on class





Clockwise from left: You think that's hot? Try Uxbridge in July 2022; An ominous shadow sweeps across a Western vista; Daniel Kaluuya shows off his horse skills.

warfare and displacement.

Nope looks at the multiple meanings of "spectacle". It unpacks cinema's romanticisation of the American frontier, itself a site of historical trauma. The dominance of white producers, feeding their movie and television machine with the misery of minorities, is played just as terrifyingly as the later, more uncanny horrors; with this, Peele turns whiteness into another monster. But he isn't too preoccupied with what *Nope* signifies. It's satisfyingly resistant to the temptation of recent horror movies that overexplain their meaning, limiting themselves to a single interpretation.

Daniel Kaluuya and Keke Palmer show delightful chemistry as OJ and Emerald 'Em' Haywood, children of a renowned Hollywood horse trainer, apparently descendants of the jockey in the 1878 photography series 'The Horse In Motion' (a key milestone in motion-picture history). Between clashes of Palmer's manic energy and Kaluuya's cool stoicism, their close encounter with the unknown becomes an obsession and a potential solution for their inner turmoil, maybe even a route to fame. Another dynasty marred by tragedy is included: Steven Yeun plays former child star 'Jupe' Park, attempting to leave behind a tabloid incident by taking refuge in a nostalgic, whitewashed, Gold Rush-styled theme park. Also fascinating is genre cinema legend Michael Wincott, playing a Quint-from-*Jaws*-type as a hermit cinematographer.

While there's commonality with *Jaws* in its quest to capture something monstrous on film (the sky taking the place of the sea), *Nope* doesn't limit itself to straightforward pastiche, embracing its influences but looking to make something new of them. With impressive precision Peele remixes a broad range of influences, including the incomprehensible terror of Lovecraft, more niche genre fare like Ron Underwood's *Tremors*, classic Hollywood, and even beyond, such as a direct reference to *Akira*, through thrilling replication of the famous bike-slide shot (perhaps his tribute to a cancelled remake he was once linked to).

Peele's regular composer Michael Abels fashions a score that cuts between the plucky tension of past work and something more grandiose, recalling the motifs of classical Westerns. Visually, cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema opens up the frame through IMAX photography, and even with that newfound height, Peele is masterful at manipulating and restricting perspective, delighting in leaving just enough out of view to allow the imagination to worsen the horror. One such moment, featuring Steven Yeun, is among the most exciting set-pieces of the year, an astonishing moment of pure, visceral sci-fi terror. Despite some often claustrophobic horror, van Hoytema and Peele even make bright, wide-open spaces feel threatening as characters struggle to catch a glimpse of the terror from above.

Through all of this, *Nope* sees Peele distinguish between the making of entertainment for an audience — a ravenous, uncaring beast, bloodying its teeth with the spectacle of other people's lives — and the act of filmmaking for yourself, capturing something impossible on camera, making a dream real. In the exploration of these ideas, the mythmaking of the Haywood ranch dovetails with Peele tearing away classic cinematic imagery from white-supremacist, manifest-destiny roots. The director repurposes it as a spectacle of the more triumphant kind, framing Kaluuya as a cowboy in a bright-orange *The Scorpion King* crew hoodie. In defining such liberation he wrangles film and television production history as the Haywoods do horses, pulling in all of his favourite cinema and lovingly demolishing and rebuilding it. *Nope* is as much a celebration of what's great about film as it is a parody of its monstrous tendencies. **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

VERDICT **An ambitious, provocative swing, *Nope* feels like that increasingly rare beast: an original blockbuster. Unspooling a horrific parody of Hollywood's hubris, it's a crowd-pleaser that wonders about the cost of pleasing a crowd.**



Who doesn't love a road trip? Oh.

[FILM]

JOYRIDE

★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15**
94 MINS

DIRECTOR Emer Reynolds
CAST Olivia Colman, Charlie Reid, Lochlann Ó Mearáin

PLOT Running away from his alcoholic gambling father, a young Irish boy named Mully (Reid) steals a taxi — only to find a mother (Colman) and her newborn baby both sleeping in the back seat. An unlikely road trip ensues.

YOU MIGHT THINK you have *Joyride* figured out. From the outset, this Irish comedy-drama seems to promise schmaltzy feelgood fun, a witty crowdpleaser in the Richard Curtis tradition. The first scene offers a cheesy pub singalong; its screwball comedy premise — an envelope of stolen charity money; a boy trying to escape his father; a mismatched road trip with a woman, a boy and a baby — is then breathlessly established in the opening ten minutes. (In such haste, it perhaps loses sight of plausible character motivation; would a middle-aged woman, even a desperate one, really not think twice about having a small boy drive her to the airport?)

But against the odds, *Joyride* could wrong-foot you. While it certainly opts for broad strokes, lightweight humour and obvious lessons, what follows after that wacky, unlikely set-up is a considered, if somewhat melodramatic, study of motherhood and family. A musing of what it means to be both a parent and to be a child — bolstered, importantly, with some winning performances.

Chief among them, of course, is Olivia Colman, who is once again staggeringly good as the "practical and solution-orientated" solicitor looking to escape her unwanted child. (After last year's *The Lost Daughter*, Colman's Reluctant Mother Era is continuing apace.) Joy — "I know, false advertising," she self-deprecatingly admits of her name — had an unplanned pregnancy, and with no maternal instincts, is now desperate to offload the newborn baby to a family member so she can move on with her life. But the road trip, as cinematic road trips so often do, offers a new perspective.

Joy meets her match with Mully (Charlie Reid, holding his own against a national treasure), a precocious but warm-hearted pre-teen lad whose age belies his emotional intelligence. A "half-orphan", he has been forced to do some speedy growing up, a childhood seemingly denied to him. In the classic mould, Joy and Mully are initially at each other's throats, but as their haphazard journey meanders through south-west Ireland, they start to thaw on each other. A surprisingly poignant scene sees Mully, who helped raise his niece, carefully school Joy in the art of breastfeeding.

There is, admittedly, a lot that feels familiar here. It occasionally indulges in some of the tropes found in commercial Irish cinema — copious helicopter shots of a luscious rural setting; a community centred around a pub; a Tommy Tiernan cameo. It borrows heavily, too, from the ghosts of road movies past; expect car breakdowns and police chases. But even if the material isn't always sparklingly fresh, its approach and execution are gently effective. This is essentially a simple story about people's capacity for love, and how generational trauma can dampen that love, but never totally smother it. If it ends on an unabashed note of feel-goodery, it's so charmingly done that it's hard to mind; there is a sweetness to this kind of filmmaking that's difficult to resist. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **It doesn't always successfully balance its comic and poignant tones, but yet another powerhouse performance from Olivia Colman makes *Joyride* a disarming experience.**



ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE

★★★

OUT **NOW (PRIME VIDEO)** / CERT **TBC** / **96 MINS**
DIRECTOR Billy Porter
CAST Eva Reign, Abubakr Ali, Renée Elise Goldsberry

This surprisingly low-key directorial debut from *Pose* star Billie Porter doesn't exactly reinvent the high-school romcom wheel — eye-sore outfits and boppy needledrops abound — but its exploration of young trans love broadens the genre's horizons with a deft, light touch. Newcomers Eva Reign and Abubakr Ali impress as headstrong trans girl Kelsa and her charming Muslim beau Khal, and it's their nervous, fizzing chemistry that really makes the film. Issues faced by the trans community — homophobia, bathroom bans, performative allyship — no sooner surface than resolve themselves, but while cinematic LGBTQ+ narratives have traditionally been trauma-bound, this celebration of queer joy lands sweetly. **JK**



MY OLD SCHOOL

★★★

OUT **19 AUGUST** / CERT **15** / **105 MINS**
DIRECTOR Jono McLeod
PARTICIPANTS Alan Cumming, Lulu, Clare Grogan, Joe McFadden

Headline-making deception lies at the heart of Jono McLeod's mixed-media documentary. The film follows Brandon Lee, McLeod's high-school peer, whose real identity shocks the world. Told via interviews with former students, *Daria*-style animation and a performance from Alan Cumming, who lip-syncs an interview with Lee, McLeod intricately presents the fabric of school life in the early '90s, choosing to focus on the impact that Lee had on the people he met rather than any broader questions of his betrayal. Taking a light, comic tone distracts from the story's power, as does the the sense of era nostalgia, but this is still a deeply personal and thorough study of a big event that rocked a small community irrevocably. **BW**



He needed to work on those lines.

[FILM]

PERSUASION

★★

OUT **NOW (NETFLIX)**
CERT **PG** / **109 MINS**

DIRECTOR Carrie Cracknell
CAST Dakota Johnson, Cosmo Jarvis, Henry Golding, Richard E. Grant, Nikki Amuka-Bird

PLOT Based on the 1817 novel by Jane Austen, Anne Elliot (Johnson) is still struggling to accept the end of her relationship with Frederick Wentworth (Jarvis). Now faced with his return, Anne must navigate the advances of her handsome cousin (Golding) or hold out for her old flame.

ONE OF MANY fabrications of Netflix's take on *Persuasion* is a scene in which our heroine, Anne Elliot (Dakota Johnson), describes a dream. In it, Anne finds herself caught in the arms of an octopus before realising that the tentacles belong to her — that she is "sucking my own face". One wonders if such a phrase would ever have passed the lips of Austen, who occupies pride of place in the pantheon of great English writers.

The description of Anne's hentai fantasy, along with discussions of "exes" and "tens", border on the sacrilegious. It is an insult to credit this film as an adaptation of Austen's *Persuasion*, for beyond character and place names, the screenplay, by Ron Bass and Alice Victoria Winslow, bears only the shallowest resemblance to that work. What Netflix has created is a version of Austen for the *Bridgerton* viewer, a candified reality show dressed in Regency clothing.

At the heart of this bastardisation is Dakota Johnson, who renders Anne a modern, melancholic bitch *à la Fleabag* (note the constant eye-flicks to camera). Her Anne guzzles red wine from the bottle, somehow listens to Beethoven in her room, and uses modern Millennial vernacular in a manner that quickly grates.

Her Wentworth hardly finds the embodiment of charisma in Cosmo Jarvis. He pales next to the effervescent charms of Henry Golding as Anne's cousin and secondary suitor, whose presence is as refreshing as the sea breeze lapping the coast of Lyme Regis. He seems to be the only person on set who has actually read a word of Austen.

Director Carrie Cracknell, making her film debut after a long career in theatre, seems quite content to have her cast standing or sitting about. While there are some pleasant shots of British beaches, it is a shame that the final stages of *Persuasion* neglect to show off Bath's architecture more. To not make proper use of Austen's former home city seems lazy, another misunderstanding of the material.

Cracknell has said that she wanted a more diverse cast than previous adaptations, and it is good to see her bringing theatrical, colour-blind casting to a period drama. Yet unlike Armando Iannucci's *The Personal History Of David Copperfield*, for example, which cast Dev Patel in the lead, the non-white cast are uncomfortably relegated to the fringes of the scenery.

Of the supporting cast, Richard E. Grant seems to have mistaken Austen for Oscar Wilde in his pantomime rendition of Anne's father, while Nikki Amuka-Bird is given a much-reduced version of Lady Russell, who takes cougar tours of Europe. It's a shame such esteemed actors have to work with this Mills & Boon version of Austen's work.

LILLIAN CRAWFORD

VERDICT **While the casting sets a long-awaited cinematic precedent, this version of *Persuasion* is anything but a ten — in Bath or anywhere else.**



Gray? Not so much. Ana de Armas and Ryan Gosling get their glad rags on.

[FILM]

THE GRAY MAN

★★★★

OUT **NOW (NETFLIX)** / CERT **15** / **120 MINS**

DIRECTORS Joe Russo, Anthony Russo
CAST Ryan Gosling, Chris Evans, Ana de Armas, Jessica Henwick, Regé-Jean Page, Billy Bob Thornton

PLOT When a CIA assassin known by the codename Sierra Six (Gosling) — aka 'the Gray Man' — learns troubling information on a mission, he goes on the run. His superiors send ruthless contractor Lloyd Hansen (Evans) to hunt him down. A deadly global cat-and-mouse chase ensues.

AFTER THE MISSHAPEN but fascinating left-turn of their last film, *Cherry*, Joe and Anthony Russo are back with a bang — several, in fact, all loud and expensive-looking. The directing brothers responsible for the remarkable one-two punch of *Infinity War* and *Endgame* return to blockbuster cinema in fine fettle with this assured, energetic, consistently compelling caper.

It has all the trappings of a modern espionage action-thriller: there is an air-mile-heavy international itinerary, a USB drive MacGuffin, a web of shady conspiracies that goes all the way to the top — and at the centre of it all, a gun-for-hire struggling with what it means to be a good man. Based on the novels by Mark Greaney, the temptation to make Bourne or Bond comparisons are all there, but the Russos' regular screenwriters, Stephen McFeely and Christopher Markus, are self-aware enough to do it for you. Their script, which leans on the genre's tropes without escaping them, gently leavens any overt seriousness with the occasional grenade of glibness.

Key to that balancing of tones are the film's opposing A-list leads, Ryan Gosling and Chris Evans. Very much two sides of the same incredibly handsome coin, their respective allegiances are handily signposted by facial hair (to wit: beard = goodie; moustache = baddie). Both are electrically watchable — Evans, in particular, gleefully pisses on Captain America's legacy to portray the kind of villain that even Thanos would consider a bit rude. His Lloyd is really just a weapons-grade asshole, who trades in, by his own admission, "bad ethics and zero impulse control". He's a ton of fun to watch.

Gosling is more reserved by comparison — it's another taciturn role where he uses his preternatural looks as a deadpan shield — but he's still effortlessly good, by turns winkingly charming and brutally convincing, sprinkling pathos and humanity into his hardened CIA off-books killer. As far as first-time action-blockbuster roles go, Gosling looks like he's been dodging fireballs for years.

Which is handy, because he has to do a lot of that. There are nine giant action sequences scattered throughout the running time, featuring explosive fireworks (in the opening fight, literally so), across planes, trams and automobiles. While you might feel the CGI in some moments, the Russos' action here is more *Winter Soldier* than *Infinity War* — lots of ground-level, stylishly shot, muscular hand-to-hand combat.

There's so much, in fact, that it's really an action film first, spy thriller second. Anyone expecting a John le Carré potboiler should look elsewhere. There's not much room for character work outside of those lead two, either — Ana de Armas isn't given the opportunity to steal scenes in the way she did in *No Time To Die*. But while it might sometimes feel like relatively superficial entertainment, it is undeniably damned entertaining, and confidently executed. If sequels are coming, as has been hinted, we're ready for the next 49 shades of Gray. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **Tinkering with the spy-action wheel rather than reinventing it, this is a pacy, ruggedly entertaining romp, with a punchy pair of lead turns from Gosling and Evans.**



FIRE OF LOVE

★★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **TBC** / **93 MINS**
DIRECTOR Sara Dosa
CAST Miranda July, Katia Krafft, Maurice Krafft

The story of Maurice and Katia Krafft is volcanic in every possible way. Their life together was one of love and adventure, as the French couple — perhaps the globe's only partnered volcanologists — devoted themselves to discovering the most dangerous parts of the natural world in order to learn to love it a bit more. Writer-director Sara Dosa turns the Kraffts' archival footage into a fairy tale, partly by enlisting actor Miranda July as narrator; her voice is so tender, the whole thing feels like magic. Maurice and Katia filmed all of their discoveries, and each other, in order to *remember*, worried that, he says, "the spectacle could vanish". With *Fire Of Love*, the couple's ambition and passion is enshrined beautifully. **EK**



MR. MALCOLM'S LIST

★★★★

OUT **26 AUGUST** / CERT **TBC** / **117 MINS**
DIRECTOR Emma Holly Jones
CAST Freida Pinto, Ṣọpẹ́ Dìrísù, Zawe Ashton

A year before *Bridgerton* became everyone's favourite Regency romp, there was *Mr. Malcolm's List*. Sort of. For her feature debut, Emma Holly Jones has expanded on her 2019 short film of the same name to delightful results. Set in 1818 London, it sees Julia (Zawe Ashton) enlist her friend Selina (Freida Pinto) in a scheme to get revenge on eligible bachelor Mr. Malcolm (Ṣọpẹ́ Dìrísù) after Julia failed to meet an item on his criteria for a bride. You won't be surprised by who ends up with each other, but there's a ton of fun in watching it unfold. It's a consistently hilarious film, shored up by charming performances that serve the tender love story. A win for colourblind casting and period-romance lovers alike. **AW**


FILMMAKERS AND TEAM EMPIRE
DIG DEEP INTO THE BEST
NEW RELEASES
THE
EMPIRE
SPOILER
SPECIAL
PODCAST
Subscribe now for at least two new episodes per month
+ exclusive access to the archive of over 200 shows
FIND OUT MORE AT EMPIREONLINE.COM/SPOILERSPECIALS
@empiremagazine



QUEEN OF GLORY

★★★★

OUT **26 AUGUST** / CERT **TBC** / **78 MINS**
DIRECTOR Nana Mensah
CAST Nana Mensah, Meeko Gattuso, Oberon K.A. Adjepong

If there's any justice, *Queen Of Glory* will be a star-making directorial debut for writer/director/star Nana Mensah. With considerable poise, she plays Sarah, a doctoral student at Columbia University who inherits a Christian bookshop in the Bronx when her Ghanaian mother dies. This is a typically New York-indie kind of film — it's beautifully shot on 35mm with an earthy palette — but Mensah's empathetic touch makes everything feel lived-in. The film lightly explores the immigrant experience and questions of identity (Sarah organises both a traditional Ghanaian funeral and a "white people's funeral"); what's most impressive is the care she affords all her characters, from the ex-con co-worker in the shop, to the aunties who tell Sarah to lose weight. A hugely impressive calling card. **JN**



THE FEAST

★★★

OUT **19 AUGUST** / CERT **18** / **93 MINS**
DIRECTOR Lee Haven Jones
CAST Annes Elwy, Nia Roberts, Julian Lewis Jones, Steffan Cennydd

Like *The Wicker Man* or *Midsommar*, *The Feast* — performed entirely in Welsh — takes an idyllic pastoral setting and contrasts it against a spot of violent eco-horror. But director Lee Haven Jones takes his time getting there, first establishing a curious ensemble through static camerawork and some foreboding tranquillity. Annes Elwy plays a young woman hired to help out at a dinner party held at the country pad of a Welsh MP who's hoping to make a deal with a local landowner. Where it's going isn't clear at first, but some eye-catching imagery — a woman voyeuristically watches a naked man shave his pubes in one scene — gives you a good hint. The denouement is bloody, naturally, and hardly subtle, but satisfyingly wild — something to really sink your teeth into. **JN**



ANAÏS IN LOVE

★★★

OUT **19 AUGUST** / CERT **TBC** / **98 MINS**
DIRECTOR Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet
CAST Anaïs Demoustier, Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi, Denis Podalydès, Anne Canovas

Somewhere between a screwball heroine and a manic pixie dream girl, perpetual grad student Anaïs (Anaïs Demoustier) sets out to seduce Parisian intellectual Emilie (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi) in Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet's debut. Exploring the delights and pitfalls of living in the now on one's own terms, this couldn't be more French. But Bourgeois-Tacquet seeks to reclaim the *jeune fille* perspective from the likes of Éric Rohmer and Philippe Garrel in charting Anaïs' breathless dash between eccentric encounters and whirlwind dalliances and weightier matters like an abortion and her mother's cancer. The leads couldn't be better, as Anaïs comes to realise that, for all her idiosyncracies and imperfections, she's not necessarily the worst person in the world. **DP**



GIRLS CAN'T SURF

★★★

OUT **19 AUGUST** / CERT **TBC** / **108 MINS**
DIRECTOR Christopher Nelius
PARTICIPANTS Jolene Smith, Jorja Smith Harmon, Jodie Cooper

Flitting between archive footage and modern-day interviews, Australian filmmaker Christopher Nelius' sports documentary is a sobering tale of historical and systemic sexism and homophobia in the surfing community. It's a chilling exposé, but Nelius allows the female surfers' passion for the sport, and their eternal zest for life, to shine through. It's a bittersweet documentary, and while at times formulaic in its filmmaking techniques, the way it tells these stories first-hand is worthy of praise. A simultaneous celebration and subversion of popular surfing culture, it makes for a dynamic cinematic experience, featuring waves, skylines and punk rock — while always foregrounding the sport's unsung heroes: women and women only. **WL**



FADIA'S TREE

★★★★

OUT **5 AUGUST** / CERT **TBC** / **82 MINS**
DIRECTOR Sarah Beddington
CAST Fadia Loubani, Sarah Beddington

This is a documentary 15 years in the making, a journey that began when a Palestinian refugee named Fadia turned to filmmaker Sarah Beddington in a Beirut cafe and asked her the deceptively simple question, "Are you happy?" This chance encounter triggered a thoughtful exploration of what it means to have a home in the middle of the world's most intractable conflict, with a lost mulberry tree that sat opposite Fadia's family home — spoken of in whispered, almost mythical tones — as a profound symbol for that idea of home. Title screens occasionally set the political context, but what's more powerful about this film are the quiet moments of visual poetry: homing pigeons are a recurring motif, silhouetted against an evening sky, finding their way home. **JN**



EIFFEL

★★

OUT **12 AUGUST** / CERT **15** / **108 MINS**
DIRECTOR Martin Bourboulon
CAST Romain Duris, Emma Mackey, Pierre Deladonchamps

"Life taught me to avoid surprises," Romain Duris' Gustave Eiffel says when showcasing the model of his iconic tower to investors, demonstrating pioneering plans to safeguard it against the elements. Unfortunately, lack of invention is exactly the problem with *Eiffel*. This is a semi-fictional, "freely inspired by a true story" telling of the French monument's conception, construction and the romantic connection threaded through Eiffel's life that (the film supposes) inspired it. Emma Mackey's luminous in her first French-speaking role as long-lost love Adrienne, but vastly underused, and her surplus of charisma can't make up for Duris' dearth of it. Despite some lovely cinematography, this is a forgettable forbidden love affair. **SB**



Not so super: Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a dog and a bloke.

[FILM]

DC LEAGUE OF SUPER-PETS

★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **PG** / **105 MINS**

DIRECTORS Jared Stern, Sam Levine
CAST Dwayne Johnson, Kevin Hart, Kate McKinnon, John Krasinski, Keanu Reeves, Natasha Lyonne, Marc Maron

PLOT When the Justice League is captured by evil guinea pig Lulu (McKinnon) and Lex Luthor (Maron), Superman's equally superheroic pet dog Krypto (Johnson) must join forces with a team of newly superpowered orphan animals, including fellow pooch Ace (Hart) and a super-fast turtle named Merton McSnurtle (Lyonne).

HERE IS THE logical next stop in the superhero cinema gold rush: a family-friendly cash-in. The 'Legion Of Super-Pets' was one of the lesser-known teams in DC comics, which since 1962 included such bizarre characters as Beppo the Super-Monkey, Detective Chimp and the Bat-Cow; sadly none of those characters appear in this very loose adaptation, which combines a fairly first-base comic-book origin-story with an equally first-base kiddie CG animation template to fashion a film seemingly driven as much by marketing and merch as story or characters. It's a fun pitch on paper — what if your pet dog was a superhero? — but in execution, it is very tiring.

As is customary for this kind of animated blockbuster, a bevy of big-name actors (many of whom have already donned capes in live action) lend their voices to the human and furry ensemble cast. It's the stunt casting of the two leads which seems most designed to draw attention, of course: regular co-stars Dwayne Johnson and Kevin Hart, the Little and Large of their generation, whose on- and off-screen bromantic antics is well-documented, from behind-the-scenes pranks on the *Jumanji* sets to mock Instagram beef.

But their usual standard of bants is largely missing here, perhaps stifled by separate recording sessions, and lumbered with lame jokes that rarely land. (Quips about Iron Man and Thor's hammer are a very laboured wink to the grown-up audience.) Johnson is at least allowed to do the People's Eyebrow in canine form and say the word "jabroni". But it's not enough.

Only Kate McKinnon, hamming it up like one of her more outlandish *Saturday Night Live* characters, makes any headway with the script, playing Lulu, the hairless guinea pig of doom, with a very funny accent that exists somewhere between a cackling wealthy dowager and Katharine Hepburn. Her villain is gloriously, campishly over-the-top — a rare saving grace.

Otherwise, it all just feels a bit pointless. The animation style is flat and uninspired, with generic character design and plasticky-smooth CG — in sharp contrast to recent innovations taken by studios like Sony or Pixar. And the plot, such as it is, could be predicted by even the youngest viewers: an evil scheme, a team that must learn to work together, a third act that neatly sorts everything out. Anyone looking to make a case for superhero fatigue would do well to use this as Exhibit A.

What makes this almost a shame is that the sort of thing they're vaguely aiming for here — a goofy, knowing send-up of the genre's most famous tropes — *could* be achieved, with just a few tweaks. The Keanu Reeves-voiced Batman, for example, is depicted as an operatically moody emo type who "recedes into the shadows" — which immediately recalls Lego Batman from *The Lego Batman Movie* (co-written, incidentally, by this film's co-director), or Spider-Man Noir from *Into The Spider-Verse*. Two films which did this kind of thing a whole lot better. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **Despite a fun voice cast, this is a lazy effort that squanders its characters, and will likely bore anyone over the age of ten. Bad dog!**



Clockwise from here: Who needs Mjolnir? Midlife-crisis-stricken Thor tries to find his mojo; Christian Bale gets his Gorr on; Natalie Portman as Jane Foster/ 'The Mighty Thor'.

[FILM]

THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER

★★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **12A**
119 MINUTES

DIRECTOR Taika Waititi
CAST Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman, Christian Bale, Tessa Thompson, Taika Waititi, Chris Pratt, Russell Crowe

PLOT Now gadding about with the Guardians Of The Galaxy, Thor (Hemsworth) is back in 'God-bod' mode. But he's wrestling with a midlife crisis — not helped by the fact that villain Gorr The God Butcher (Bale) is living up to his name, or that old flame Jane Foster (Portman) has shown up with his old hammer Mjolnir and going by 'The Mighty Thor'.

SUPERHERO MOVIES ARE like guitar solos. They can be a bit noodly, and tend to go on a little too long — but when they're done just right they absolutely soar, imbued with the kind of joy and wild abandon that makes you feel alive. *Thor: Love And Thunder* — Taika Waititi's iridescent follow-up to the irreverent *Ragnarok* — is a giddy, gleaming guitar solo of a movie; a celebratory blast of colour, energy and emotion. It even *has* a guitar solo — opening with a shredding, squealing, Wyld Stallyns-style version of the Marvel Studios fanfare.

Last time around, Waititi's mission was to make Thor really, properly *cool* — ditching the high-fantasy jargon and redundant sidekicks of the Norse God's previous outings for a cosmic, campy space opera with lashings of self-deprecating humour and Jeff Goldblum as a gold-robed space-tyrant. Plenty of *Ragnarok*'s raucous DNA remains in *Love And Thunder*, cranked to even greater heights: Waititi's own rib-tickling rock-man Korg now steps up as narrator, the Technicolor palette is overhauled in even lighter pastel hues, and this time it's Russell Crowe's turn to cut loose, his Zeus a preening prat of a Greek god.

But in many ways, it's a different beast. Where *Ragnarok* sometimes teetered towards a tone of self-satisfaction, Taika Waititi is at his best when being truly vulnerable — offsetting the barrage of winking gags with explorations of loss, loneliness and inadequacy (see: *Hunt For The Wilderpeople* and *Boy*). *Love And Thunder* does just that. It is, appropriately, a film about love in all its forms — about its transformative and regenerative powers, and how empty life can feel without it. The film capitalises on the

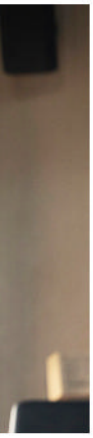


events of *Avengers: Endgame* beautifully — less in the team-up between Thor and the Guardians (a blast to watch, but they part ways fairly early on), more in dealing with the grief, self-hatred and guilt that the God Of Thunder is wading through. That void, that emptiness, Waititi posits, is worse than the pain that love can bring.

Much of love's sting comes from the reintroduction of Natalie Portman's Jane Foster. Taking inspiration from Jason Aaron's comics run, Foster isn't just back — she's also wielding Mjolnir (whose new tricks make for a slew of 'holy *crap*' action beats) in the guise of 'The







Mighty Thor'. Largely forgotten by the MCU post-*Thor: The Dark World*, Portman makes an excellent Marvel comeback, given more to play here than in all her previous appearances. She, too, gets to be vulnerable, wrestling with life's biggest challenges while playing a Thor with very little experience of, well, being Thor.

If anything gets a tad lost in the mix, it's Gorr The God Butcher. Taken from a different Aaron comics run, the deathly deity-slayer isn't quite as foreboding as he is on the page, and jostles for space among Thor and friends (Tessa Thompson's Valkyrie, too, comes out shortchanged) — though Christian Bale's ghoulishly odd performance means he's no Malekith-esque dud. Plus, Gorr's connection to the Shadow Realm means he's responsible for some of the film's most striking visual moments — all colour draining from the frame in his presence, our heroes' powers punctuating the gloom in neon bursts.

In so many ways, for mostly better and occasionally worse (a jaunt to Omnipotent City drags a touch), *Thor: Love And Thunder* is a deeply weird, deeply wonderful triumph. It's a movie that dares to be seriously uncool, and somehow ends up all the cooler for it — sidesplittingly funny, surprisingly sentimental, and so tonally daring that it's a miracle it doesn't collapse. The Gorr-centric cold-open is as dark as the MCU gets, but this is also a *Thor* romcom with a loved-up ABBA montage, and a Viking longboat pulled through space by a pair of gigantic screaming goats (who nearly run away with the film). It's a movie about midlife crisis that feels like you're watching one in action, with its gourmet gods, glorious intergalactic biker-chicken battle, and Guns N' Roses galore (the 'November Rain' solo is deployed *perfectly*). And come the closing reel, when the true meaning of its title is unveiled, it leaves our hero in a place so sweet and surprising, you'll be truly moved. It's a Taika Waititi movie, then — we could watch his cinematic guitar solos all day. **BEN TRAVIS**

VERDICT **Weirder than *Ragnarok*, but incredibly sincere in its outlook, Taika's Thor-quel is a big, beautiful blast. You'll love it, and probably thunder it too. What a classic Thor adventure!**



Tense times as the divers and kids attempt to escape.

[FILM]

THIRTEEN LIVES

★★★

OUT **NOW (CINEMAS) / 5 AUGUST (PRIME VIDEO)**
CERT **TBC / TBC MINS**

DIRECTOR Ron Howard
CAST Viggo Mortensen, Colin Farrell, Joel Edgerton

PLOT Thailand, June 2018. The Wild Boars junior football team and their coach (Teeradon Supapunpinyo) go missing while exploring caves. When the Royal Thai Navy SEALs rescue mission fails, an expedition led by British cave-divers Richard Stanton (Mortensen) and John Volanthen (Farrell) offers one last hope.

IN A DIRECTING career that kick-started with Tom Hanks falling in love with a fish (*Splash*), Ron Howard's interests have gravitated more recently towards true-life stories, both in his dramas (*Frost/Nixon, Rush, Hillbilly Elegy*) and in his newfound predilection for documentary (portraits of The Beatles and Pavarotti, plus *Rebuilding Paradise* and *We Feed People*, two films documenting very different disasters). This passion for veracity is present in *Thirteen Lives*, Howard's low-key but ultimately engaging re-staging of the rescue of a Thai kids' football team trapped in a network of caves filling up with water, the documentary feel of which works to both its detriment and success.

It's a slow, subdued start. There is little in the way of preamble to get us involved with the kids and Howard sensitively eschews showing the minutiae of the team getting trapped. Instead, he is more interested in the response to the crisis in curiously uninvolving scenes depicting the worry of the families, the Royal Thai Navy SEALs' failed attempt at a rescue, revered monk Kruba Boonchum's (Nyi Nyi Lwin) arrival to give the people sustenance (Howard overdoes cutaways of tiny Buddhas and religious trinkets), and the machinations of who is politically taking the fall for the disaster. This battle amongst the authorities feels like a ripe area for gripping subterfuge but feels thrown away.

Things don't really improve when the movie stars show up. Colin Farrell (doing an off-putting English accent) as John Volanthen and Viggo Mortensen as Richard Stanton both give incredibly muted, presumably-designed-to-be-naturalistic performances as the British cave-divers with true expertise — the only distinctive character trait that either of them displays is a possessive quality over custard creams. (Hopefully *Thirteen Lives* will do for the biscuit what *Avengers Assemble* did for shawarma.)

Around the mission to save the kids is the equally important work of Thanet Natisri (Nophand Boonyai), a water engineer who takes matters into his own hands and sets about recruiting locals to divert millions of gallons of water away from the mountainside to stop the caves getting flooded further. It's a noble endeavour, but not particularly the stuff of memorable drama.

But stick with it and things do improve. Caves, rain and torchlight are always cinematic — there are also some fancy-dan graphics to tell us what chamber the kids/rescuers are in — and Thai cinematographer Sayombhu Mukdeeprom finds haunting, textured imagery in stalactite tunnels. Howard is a past master at making you care about an outcome you already know — see *Apollo 13* and *Rush* — and when the film moves into the business end, coinciding with Joel Edgerton turning up as a maverick pal of Stanton and Volanthen, *Thirteen Lives* delivers. Howard understands that the juice here is in the details, and the way in which the team are extracted to safety is precisely etched and gripping. You get the sense that this is the reason why Howard wanted to do the movie and, like his itinerant cave-divers, it's here that all his experience and skills pay off. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT **For its first half, *Thirteen Lives* feels like it is treading water, waiting for its big final act. Thankfully, the second half is a riveting depiction of a daring, foolhardy, inspired rescue.**



Girl in the picture: Daisy Edgar-Jones as the reclusive Kya.

[FILM]

WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING

★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15**
125 MINS

DIRECTOR Olivia Newman
CAST Daisy Edgar-Jones, Taylor John Smith, Harris Dickinson, David Strathairn

PLOT Kya Clark (Edgar-Jones) is a reclusive outsider, living alone and raising herself in the marshes of 1960s North Carolina after being abandoned by her entire family. When a man she was previously involved with dies mysteriously, she is suspected of his murder.

TRANSLATING A MUCH-loved novel to the big screen is always a tricky task. With Delia Owens' *Where The Crawdads Sing*, which has sold more than 12 million copies to date, the audience is big and the expectations are high. This cinematic version, produced by Reese Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine, unfortunately doesn't succeed in meeting them.

Daisy Edgar-Jones, a star on the rise after her incredible performance in BBC/Hulu series *Normal People* and playing a gutsy final girl in horror-thriller *Fresh*, is plunged into a swampy, period environment here. She is Kya, a solitary young woman left to fend for herself after her mother, then siblings, then abusive father, all desert her. Shunned by the townsfolk around her, it doesn't take long for fingers to point in her direction when a man is found dead near her home.

This murder accusation, and the trial deciding Kya's fate, is the framing device for the film. Ditching the more chronological approach of the book, Lucy Alibar's screenplay reveals the crime at the very top of the runtime, flashing backwards and forwards to fill in the gaps. This might not be an uncommon way to approach this kind of story, but it does dispel a certain amount of tension from the start — and the loose, feeble attempt at courtroom drama is nowhere near gripping enough to make it a setting we're keen to return to.

Edgar-Jones' natural charm, steely determination and convincing, almost-feral disposition, especially early on, keep you on Kya's side, and Harris Dickinson impresses once again as charmingly sinister former quarterback Chase Andrews. He and Kya's toxic, sometimes violent relationship adds some edge to this otherwise quite gentle movie — and though their dynamic is contrasted nicely by the safety and warmth Kya feels with all-American shrimper's son Tate (Taylor John Smith), the latter pairing leaves a lot to be desired in terms of chemistry.

The trouble with this version of *Where The Crawdads Sing* is that you never quite buy the young, thin, beautiful, white Kya as a true outsider. The girl from the novel, covered in dirt and consumed by gnawing loneliness, is sanded down and smoothed out, her every thought over-explained by incessant voiceover. That treatment seems to have been applied to every other element of the film, too — so much so, it feels like it would be more at home in the BBC's 8pm Sunday night slot than here on the big screen. The direction and cinematography are thoroughly conventional, lacking in much flavour or wonder, save for some beautiful sunset shots of the marshes, and the score is often saccharine and overbearing. For fans of the book, there will be some satisfaction in watching these characters come to life and the plot's twists and turns play out — but for newcomers to this story, it is, unfortunately, underwhelming. **SOPHIE BUTCHER**

VERDICT **Though solidly made and bolstered by the always-engaging Daisy Edgar-Jones and Harris Dickinson, *Where The Crawdads Sing* struggles to live up to the promising popularity of its source material. A flat, flair-free and uninspiring adaptation.**



AKILLA'S ESCAPE

★★★★

OUT **26 AUGUST** / CERT **TBC** / 90 **MINS**
DIRECTOR Charles Officer
CAST Saul Williams, Ronnie Rowe, Thamela Mpumlwana, Vic Mensa

The opening titles of this intriguing crime thriller — archive footage and newspaper headlines, evoking the history of Jamaica from colonialism to gang violence — perfectly cue up a sensitive exploration of how young men get swept up into a life of crime. Saul Williams is a magnetic presence as Akilla, a conflicted Canadian drug-dealer who takes under his wing a teen stick-up kid who tried to rob him. Flashbacks to a teenage Akilla cement the theme of generational violence. It sometimes veers into didactic territory, but it's handsomely shot and powerfully executed. As his mother explains, Akilla's father is a "product of people torn apart by poverty, greed and political violence". **JN**



BLIND AMBITION

★★★

OUT **12 AUGUST** / CERT **TBC** / **96 MINS**
DIRECTORS Robert Coe, Warwick Ross
PARTICIPANTS Joseph Dhafana, Marlvin Gwese, Tinashe Nyamudoka

"It's like Egypt putting together a team of skiers in the Winter Olympics." This quote from a wine expert neatly sets up the premise of this charming doc: essentially *Cool Runnings*, but with wine. A group of Zimbabwean refugees enter the country's first team at the 'Olympics of wine tasting' — where they must blindly identify the grape, country, region, producer and vintage of 12 mystery wines. It plays like a sports movie, with training montages, emotional backstories and a tense, competitive final act. The filmmaking is low-key, almost to a fault — but the stories of the four sommeliers maintains attention, shattering the old-fashioned stuffiness of the wine world with energy and humanity. **JN**

PILOT TV 200

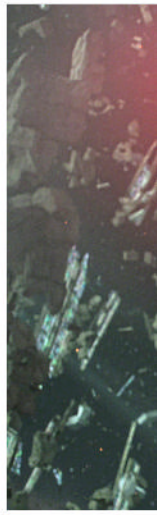
JOIN US FOR AN ALL-DAY LIVE PODCAST EVENT FOR OUR 200th EPISODE.
WITH PREVIEWS OF THE BIGGEST TV SHOWS AND VERY SPECIAL GUESTS.

SUNDAY 21 AUGUST
KINGS PLACE, LONDON

BOOK NOW

@pilottvpod





[TV]

THE SANDMAN

★★★★

OUT **5 AUGUST (NETFLIX)** / EPISODES VIEWED **6 OF 10**

SHOWRUNNER Allan Heinberg
CAST Tom Sturridge, Gwendoline Christie, Vivienne Acheampong, Boyd Holbrook, Charles Dance, Asim Chaudhry, Sanjeev Bhaskar

PLOT The Lord of Dreams, Morpheus (Sturridge), captured by an evil wizard a century ago, is freed into the modern world. While away, his kingdom has fallen into ruin and the dreams and nightmares he once presided over have been set loose in the waking world of mortal men. To reclaim his power, Morpheus must not only travel to Hell and back, but find hope in humanity once again.

AS FAR AS comic books are concerned, there is nothing quite like Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* saga, a 75-issue, sprawling, dark fantasy epic considered the best of what the medium can be. For decades, Hollywood has sought to find a way to bring the tale of Morpheus (aka Dream) and his siblings, the Endless, to life on the big screen, without success — until now.

The first answer to solving the puzzle came in looking at *The Sandman* not as a film adaptation, but a television series that could play to the episodic strengths, occasional anthology format, and shifting timelines of the source material. The second answer came in bringing Gaiman himself aboard the series to develop it. Gaiman's hand is felt throughout as it faithfully adapts the comic nearly issue-by-issue with each episode. There are some slight changes, particularly with regard to representation and modernisation, as one would hope for in a contemporary adaptation, even for a comic considered progressive for 1989. From stylish direction and cinematography drawn straight from the comic panel, to the inclusion of even the most minor characters, and faithful dialogue that is both poetic and unpretentious, there's more than enough fidelity to win over longtime fans.

Newcomers to the mythos, meanwhile, may be surprised at how quickly they're thrown in the deep end and loaded up with exposition in the first two episodes. Make no mistake, the approach here is anything but grounded and streamlined. And despite its comic-book history and DC logo, it's also emphatically not a superhero series revolving around fist fights and skyscraper-demolishing battles — even though the stakes, as they unfold, could not be higher.



There's nothing traditional — or predictable — at play here. By the third episode, things settle down enough to leave you on relatively stable ground, at least as much as any dreamscape could offer.

Of course, the accuracy to the source material would do little if not for brilliant actors to bring these storied characters to life. Tom Sturridge, not yet a major name, is pitch-perfect in making Morpheus flesh and blood, deftly navigating his stoicism and distance with a sad, though not entirely charmless, sense







Clockwise from left: Cain (Sanjeev Bhaskar), Abel (Asim Chaudhry) and Morpheus (Tom Sturridge) with this year's must-have pet; Hathaway (Bill Paterson) has a great party trick; Morpheus with Death (Kirby Howell-Baptiste).

of punk-Byronic loneliness. Morpheus is both the lead and the straight man, which with the wrong actor could make him boring. But Sturridge gives him an on-screen presence that's hard to look away from, and much like the comics, it's the wild cast of supporting characters that truly define who Morpheus is. Kirby Howell-Baptiste is equally impressive as Morpheus' sister, Death, introduced in the sixth episode. She brings the effervescent love for humanity and joy for Earth to the character in a way that is quite moving in its empathy.

Morpheus' journey to reclaim his stolen artifacts of power, with the help of librarian Lucienne (Vivienne Acheampong) and raven Matthew (Patton Oswalt), find him caught up in games of fate, deception and heartbreak with Lucifer (Gwendoline Christie), The Corinthian (Boyd Holbrook), and the gender-swapped Johanna Constantine (Jenna Coleman) — the last being arguably the best on-screen portrayal yet seen of the famed occultist. But it is David Thewlis' John Dee, a pyjama-clad, escaped mental patient in possession of Morpheus' Ruby, who steals the show during the first half of the season, and becomes the centre of the chilling fifth episode, '24/7'. It is in John Dee's pathetically human quest to steal hope from people in order to reveal the truth that *The Sandman* sees its greatest strength revealed. What was true of the comics is true here: for all the mystery, horror, and personified concepts older than the universe, *The Sandman* is about the lives of ordinary people — the waitress, the kindly woman who offers you a ride, the romantic and the liar, and how they weave a world for such magic to exist, through their dreams and nightmares.

RICHARD NEWBY

VERDICT **With its attention to the source material, its impressive cast, and the kind of expansive world-building that surely demands more seasons, *The Sandman* is what dreams are made of.**



She'd been expecting The Ritz.

[TV]

BETTER CALL SAUL: SEASON 6

★★★★★

OUT NOW **(NETFLIX)** / EPISODES VIEWED **9 OF 13**

SHOWRUNNER Peter Gould
CAST Bob Odenkirk, Rhea Seehorn, Jonathan Banks, Giancarlo Esposito, Patrick Fabian, Michael Mando, Tony Dalton

PLOT As public defender Jimmy (Odenkirk) completes his transformation into dodgy lawyer-for-hire Saul, his wife Kim (Seehorn) hatches a plan to ruin former colleague Howard (Fabian). Meanwhile, poor Nacho (Mando) takes the blame for the raid on Lalo (Dalton), who pretends to be dead so he can plot his revenge on Gus (Esposito).

BETTER CALL SAUL loves a disorienting cold open. A couple of elderly cyclists in shell-suits riding round their neighbourhood complaining about the gaudy red colour of a newly painted house. A steady pan across a scrubby wilderness alighting on a seemingly random bit of weed, and a bloody sliver of broken glass. The meticulous creation of a sculpture made of lucite. Throughout all these beautiful vignettes, we're thinking, "What the hell does any of this have to do with Jimmy and Kim and Nacho and Lalo and Mike and Gus?" Eventually the details are pieced together and by the end of each episode, their wider significance becomes clear.

This narrative trickery works brilliantly because the whole show is built around puzzles: Why does Jimmy (Bob Odenkirk) become Saul? What happens to Kim (Rhea Seehorn) that she's never mentioned in the parent show? How does Jimmy/Saul extricate himself from... everything? And why will Jimmy/Saul turn into Gene who works in a Cinnabon in Omaha, Nebraska?

This final season also underlines how the show has melded genres so effectively. It's part legal/relationship drama following Jimmy/Saul and wife Kim's careers and life together, and part crime thriller tracing Jimmy's tragic involvement with "connected" types Lalo (Tony Dalton), Gus (Giancarlo Esposito) and Mike (Jonathan Banks). The mid-season finale weaves those strands together spectacularly, ending with a stunning act of violence committed by the psychopathic Lalo in Jimmy and Kim's home. The ramifications of that moment become spectacularly clear in the next two episodes, the first of which is a masterpiece of sustained tension told almost in real time; while the second slows down to delve as deep as it ever has into the core characters.

This episode's opening montage of Saul and Kim trying to get on with their lives, set to Harry Nilsson's song 'Perfect Day', is a work of art. Witness the cut from Jimmy mopping up his red marinara sauce at lunch to Mike wiping rivulets of blood from their floorboards. The ensuing confrontation between Kim and Jimmy, brutally exposing the raw truth at the heart of their relationship, is as scary as the gruesome fight between Gus and Lalo. But the stakes here are even higher, because they're soulmates, and we're rooting for them to the bitter end.

For a show set in a world so steeped in crime and violence, it's startling just how calamitous an impact these plot developments are having. Because it was all fun and games until someone got hurt. And now Kim's guilt is corroding everything for her. Jimmy is desperately trying to convince himself, as much as Kim, that they can get over it. But Kim knows the truth. "Together we're poison," she says. Rhea Seehorn and Bob Odenkirk are in a league of their own in that scene — as is this whole stupendous series. **BOYD HILTON**

VERDICT **As it nears its climax, and we ponder not if but how they'll stick the landing, *Better Call Saul*'s steady rise to the giddy heights of all-time classic television drama feels inexorable.**



"Hmm, you think mutton chops might suit me too, bro?"

[TV]

BLACK BIRD

★★★★

OUT **NOW (APPLE TV+)**
EPISODES VIEWED **6 OF 6**

SHOWRUNNER Dennis Lehane
CAST Taron Egerton, Paul Walter Hauser, Ray Liotta, Greg Kinnear, Sepideh Moafi

PLOT Chicago, 1996. Drug trafficker Jimmy Keene (Egerton) faces a ten-year prison sentence. Then the FBI approaches him with a strange offer: transfer to a maximum-security prison for the "criminally insane", gather evidence to finally quash the appeal of suspected serial killer Larry Hall (Hauser), and Jimmy can earn his freedom.

IF OUR RAVENOUS, almost Victorian appetite for true-crime stories must be sated, we might as well get someone like Dennis Lehane to tell them. The author-turned-screenwriter has repeatedly proven his talent for mystery and crime fiction, channelled into collaborations with the likes of Martin Scorsese (*Shutter Island*) and David Simon (*The Wire*) — and there are flashes of the influence of both in this tightly constructed adaptation of the memoir *In With The Devil: A Fallen Hero, A Serial Killer, And A Dangerous Bargain For Redemption* by James Keene.

That lengthy subtitle gives you an idea of what to expect: this is the kind of meaty affair that would seem far-fetched if it wasn't all basically true. Any worries that yet another story is putting a murderer and a rapist at the heart of a narrative are largely quelled by the thoughtfulness and care with which Lehane tells it, exploring how the misogyny of our worst crimes can often reflect back at us.

Given it's adapting Keene's own memoir, it's his story that is the initial driver, but there are really twin narratives at play here, the timelines jumping between 1996 and 1993 when police first begin investigating the apparently connected murders of young girls. It's a complex case, across state lines, told slowly and assuredly, with a pace that requires patience.

But it pays off when the show morphs from police procedural to unconventional prison drama. Egerton — so often disappearing into larger-than-life characters such as Elton John or Eddie The Eagle — is here encouraged to bring his natural charisma to the forefront, playing Jimmy as a career criminal who gets by on business-like diplomacy and charm, even in a house of horrors. It hits familiar beats of previous jailhouse plots, but effectively summons a sense of menace — a spectacularly staged prison riot, an orgy of senseless violence, underscores the danger Jimmy faces — while guards and inmates alike prove an existential threat.

It's Larry Hall (Walter Hauser), though, who is the most riveting, and potentially most dangerous. His high-pitched voice suggests a harmless weirdo to most of the local law enforcement, who write him off as a serial confessor; in prison, he leads a tranquil life in the workshop. But he is, as one character describes him, "creepy as all fuck", and Paul Walter Hauser — whose specialism has become screen scumbags — cuts a chillingly pathetic figure, taking care to make him wretched without ever seeming sympathetic.

Lehane's dense writing and Michaël R. Roskam's handsome, cinematic direction are themselves worth the binge, but it's the performances that really stand out here — and in one of his final roles, it's hard not to be moved by the late Ray Liotta, as Jimmy's father. Played almost as a coda to his early gangster roles, he is a retired dirty cop, left only to live with regret. It is a heartbreaking turn — and a stark, resonant reminder of the actor we have lost. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **This is a tense true-crime story told with immense confidence and care — but it's the performances, especially from Paul Walter Hauser and Ray Liotta, that really make *Black Bird* sing.**



RESIDENT EVIL

★★★

OUT **NOW (NETFLIX)** / EPISODES VIEWED **4 OF 8**
SHOWRUNNER Andrew Dabb
CAST Ella Balinska, Lance Reddick, Tamara Smart

This latest adaptation of the long-running zombie video-game franchise is still firmly in 'guilty pleasure' territory, but there is fun to be had from its signature trashy approach. Unlike the Paul W.S. Anderson films or the recent big-screen reboot, this series is both pre- *and* post-apocalyptic, depicting the lead-up to the T-virus outbreak in 2022, and its dystopian aftermath in 2036. The earlier timeline is less engaging, playing like a high-school soap (Zoomer zombies!), but even with some occasionally shoddy CGI, it's not short on ambitious imagery and gleeful gore. While it won't quite fill the void left by *The Walking Dead*'s exit this year, this is still an enjoyably silly, teen-friendly take on zombie carnage. **JN**

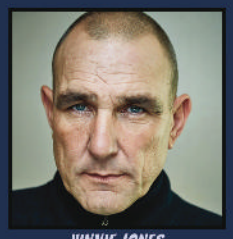


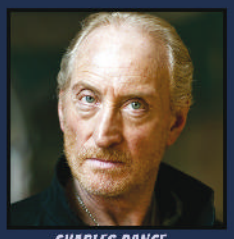
THE TERMINAL LIST

★★

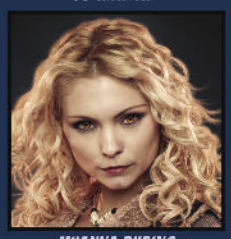
OUT **NOW (PRIME VIDEO)** / EPISODES VIEWED **8 OF 8**
SHOWRUNNER David DiGilio
CAST Chris Pratt, Taylor Kitsch, Constance Wu

A brawny, boring 'thriller' (in intent, if not execution), *The Terminal List* strips Chris Pratt of all his appealing qualities. All humour and self-awareness wrung out of him, he's just another beefy action guy, bringing none of his movie-star charisma to a show that *really* needs it. Pratt plays James Reece, the head of a SEAL team who finds himself embroiled in a bizarre conspiracy after his team is decimated on a mission to kill a terrorist. But the plot is so simplistic, there's really no challenge to following it. The far bigger challenge is maintaining any interest. If you enjoyed *Jack Ryan* and *Reacher*, this is the show the algorithm would say you should watch next. Ignore it. **OR**


VINNIE JONES

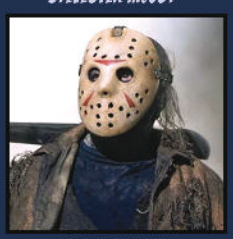

CHARLES DANCE

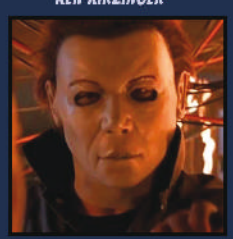

JO MARTIN


MYANNA BURING


JIMMY VEE


SYLVESTER McCOY


KEN KIRZINGER


BRAD LOREE



FILM & COMIC CON BIRMINGHAM

COLLECTORMANIA 27

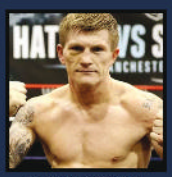
3 - 4 SEPT 2022 NEC

HAVE A FUN DAY OUT FOR ONLY £10 AFTER 11AM
OR BEAT THOSE CROWDS WITH EARLY ENTRY, JUST £15 FROM 9AM!

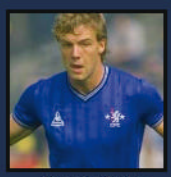
MANY MORE GUESTS STILL TO BE ANNOUNCED!

PLUS LARGE DEALERS HALL, PHOTO SESSIONS, DISPLAYS, AUTOGRAPH SIGNINGS, TALKS, & MORE!


CHRIS WADDLE


RICKY HATTON


JOSH WARRINGTON


KERRY DIXON


STEVE BULL


ALLAN CLARKE

WWW.FILMANDCOMICCONBIRMINGHAM.COM

Guests charge for autographs, are subject to work commitments, and not signing all days. Queues form before event starts. Check site for terms/conditions



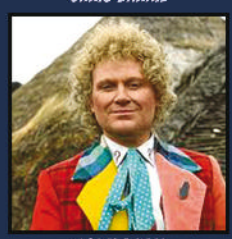

KEITH ALLEN

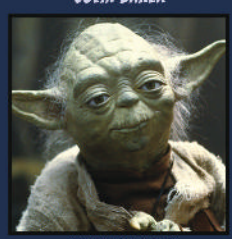

JESSIE CAVE

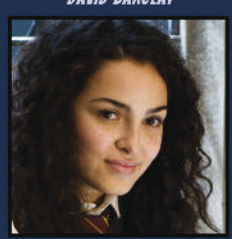

JACK GLEESON


LUCY MARTIN


CHRIS BARRIE


COLIN BAKER


DAVID BARCLAY


ANNA SHAFFER

WIZARDING WORLD | Harry Potter

COME EXPERIENCE THE MAGIC OF THE WIZARDING WORLD WITH CORGI

In need of a helping hand from the friendliest half-giant to reside at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry? Then Hagrid's motorcycle and sidecar is the mode of transportation you are most likely to see him arrive on. This brand new die-cast model features Hagrid and Harry Potter as seen in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part One.



Complete your Collection!

CC99727
Hagrid's Motorcycle and Sidecar
Scale: 1:36 | Length 64mm

WIZARDING WORLD characters, names and related indicia are © & ™ Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. WB SHIELD: © & ™ WBEL Publishing Rights © JKR. (s22)

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CORGI'S HARRY POTTER COLLECTION
BY CONTACTING **01843 233 525 / SALES@HORNBY.COM**

CORGI
www.corgi.co.uk

DO YOU HAVE A VINYL RECORD COLLECTION TO SELL?

We are interested in viewing ALL quality collections of vinyl records and CDs ANYWHERE throughout the UK and Ireland. We'll travel to you.

Contact The Sound Machine if you would like to talk with one of our specialists or to arrange a viewing appointment.

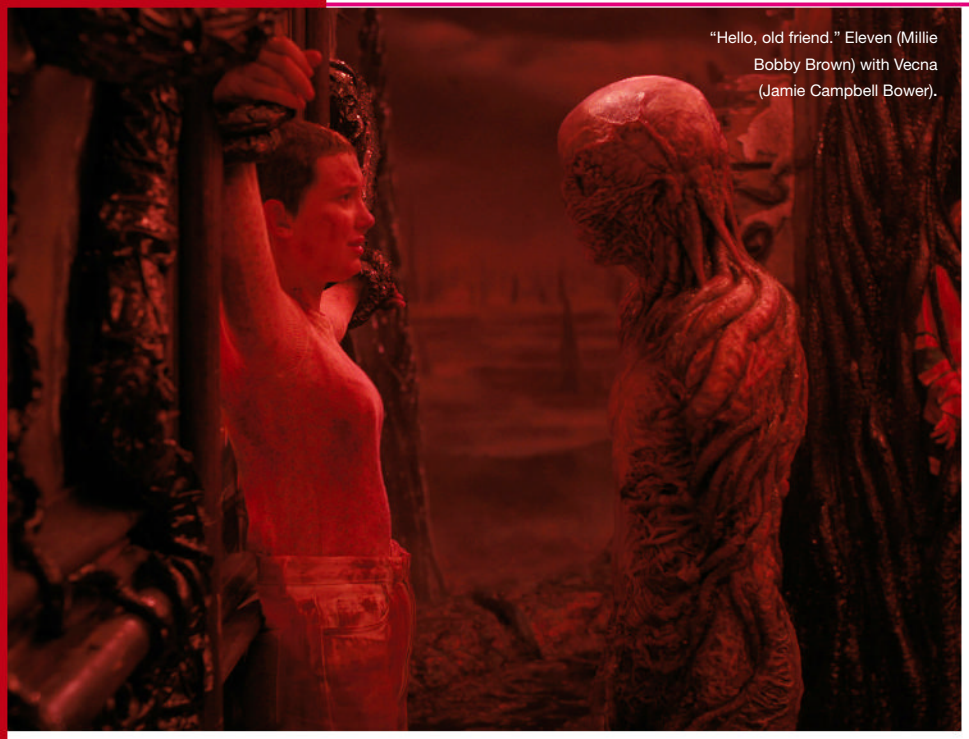
THE SOUND MACHINE

Reading's Longest Established Independent Record Shop

Specialists in buying and selling new and second-hand vinyl records and CDs across all genres.

info@thesoundmachine.uk.com
0118 957 5075 | 07786 078 361
24 Harris Arcade, Reading, Berkshire RG1 1DN

thesoundmachine.uk.com



"Hello, old friend." Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown) with Vecna (Jamie Campbell Bower).

[TV]

STRANGER THINGS: SEASON 4, VOLUME 2

★★★★

OUT **NOW (NETFLIX)** / EPISODES VIEWED **2 OF 2**

SHOWRUNNERS Ross Duffer, Matt Duffer
CAST Millie Bobby Brown, Finn Wolfhard, David Harbour, Winona Ryder, Brett Gelman, Charlie Heaton, Natalia Dyer, Joe Keery, Noah Schnapp

PLOT After the reveal of Vecna's identity at the end of Volume 1, Eleven (Brown) prepares to push her newly regained powers to the limit, while Mike (Wolfhard) and Will (Schnapp) try to find her. The rest of the gang suit up for battle and devise a plan to return to the Upside Down and save Hawkins.

AROUND 15 MINUTES into Chapter Eight, the first instalment in the mega double-feature-length Volume 2 of *Stranger Things* Season 4, we finally find out what Will was painting on that canvas he's been carrying around. Don't worry, we won't go into detail — no spoilers here — but it serves as a reminder of something this new season, as action-packed, spine-chilling and epically soundtracked as it is, has been missing so far: heart. As Will (Noah Schnapp) says, "I know it's sort of on the nose, but that's what holds this whole party together."

With Volume 1, *Stranger Things* returned to form in a big way — but with a brand-new (or is he?) villain to introduce, several new settings to establish and a whole lot of plot to get through, there was barely a second to soak it all in and see some true character development. Volume 2 provides that in spades, using every minute of those remarkably long episodes to surround all the Vecna-vanquishing with an immense amount of emotion, connection, and, yes, heart.

Threads that seemed so disparate in Volume 1 come together well — for the most part: Hopper (David Harbour) and Joyce's (Winona Ryder) Soviet escapades, while enjoyable, still feel somewhat tacked on — especially in the final episode, where some masterful editing enables the viewer to keep up with each group as well as follow how their actions affect each other.

Somehow, despite the shedload of characters to manage, everyone is given a standout moment: Will and Jonathan (Charlie Heaton) restoring their brotherly bond beautifully; Mike (Finn Wolfhard) realising just how much El (Millie Bobby Brown) needs him, no matter how powerful she is; Steve (Joe Keery) opening up to Nancy (Natalia Dyer), showing her (and us) a side of him we've never seen; Max's (Sadie Sink) tearful speech about the dark thoughts that made her so susceptible to Vecna's curse. Though the 150-minute finale runtime is undeniably self-indulgent on paper, it is emphatically earned on screen.

It's not all touchy-feely heart-to-hearts, though — the action set-pieces have stepped up a gear, too. The explosive climax to Chapter Eight, seemingly shot entirely practically, is one of *Stranger Things*' best scenes to date; a fight between Jason (Mason Dye) and Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin) doused in blue light pulls no punches; and the gang's big showdown with Vecna is a glorious, slow-mo affair. And yes, there's more 'Running Up That Hill'.

This long-awaited season finale is, inescapably, formulaic. It does, however, execute that journey incredibly well, and make you feel closer to these characters than ever before — and with a cast this good, a saga this grand, and a world this richly painted, that's more than enough. **SOPHIE BUTCHER**

VERDICT **What Volume 2 lacks in surprises, it more than makes up for in thrilling direction and moving performances. A strong closing chapter that makes the idea of returning to Hawkins one last time more inviting than ever.**

EMPIRE SCREEN CHECKLIST

Your at-a-glance view of this month's reviews



FILM
OUT NOW

ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE	★★★	P35
DC LEAGUE OF SUPER-PETS	★★	P39
FIRE OF LOVE	★★★★	P36
THE GRAY MAN	★★★★	P36
JOYRIDE	★★★	P34
THIRTEEN LIVES	★★★	P41
THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER	★★★★	P40
PERSUASION	★★	P35
WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING	★★	P42

5 AUGUST

FADIA'S TREE	★★★★	P38

12 AUGUST

BLIND AMBITION	★★★	P42
EIFFEL	★★	P38
NOPE	★★★★★	P32

19 AUGUST

ANÄIS IN LOVE	★★★	P38
GIRLS CAN'T SURF	★★★	P38
MY OLD SCHOOL	★★★	P35
THE FEAST	★★★	P38

26 AUGUST

AKILLA'S ESCAPE	★★★★	P42
MR. MALCOLM'S LIST	★★★★	P36
QUEEN OF GLORY	★★★★	P38

TV
OUT NOW

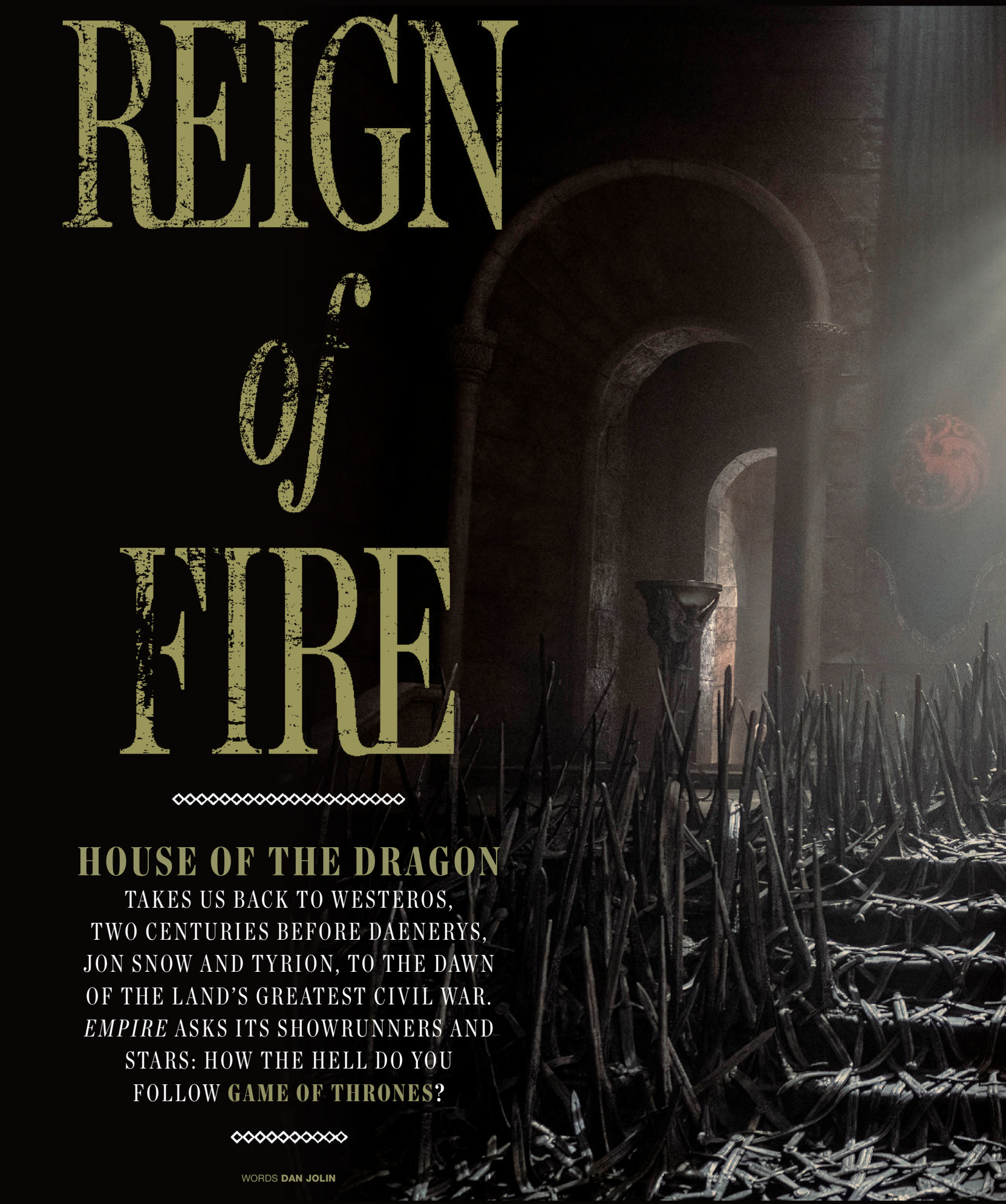
BETTER CALL SAUL: SEASON 6	★★★★★	P45
BLACK BIRD	★★★★	P46
RESIDENT EVIL	★★★	P46
STRANGER THINGS: SEASON 4, VOLUME 2	★★★★	P49
THE TERMINAL LIST	★★	P46

5 AUGUST

THE SANDMAN (ABOVE)	★★★★	P44

FOR MORE REVIEWS, VISIT EMPIREONLINE.COM

REIGN *of* FIRE



HOUSE OF THE DRAGON TAKES US BACK TO WESTEROS, TWO CENTURIES BEFORE DAENERYS, JON SNOW AND TYRION, TO THE DAWN OF THE LAND'S GREATEST CIVIL WAR. *EMPIRE* ASKS ITS SHOWRUNNERS AND STARS: HOW THE HELL DO YOU FOLLOW **GAME OF THRONES**?

WORDS **DAN JOLIN**





PADDY CONSIDINE CAN'T BELIEVE WHERE HE'S SITTING.

For the very first time, the Burton-upon-Trent-born actor has just parked his rear end on what is arguably the most recognisable chair in popular culture. Forged from more than a thousand swords of Aegon the Conqueror's vanquished foes, it is the deliberately uncomfortable seat of power for the King of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men. Namely, the Iron Throne, for which many a deadly game has been played, many a bloody battle fought.

Director/showrunner Miguel Sapochnik trots up the seven steps to join him on his lofty plinth. "How does it feel?" he asks. "This is *great*!" grins Considine, bewigged in platinum blond as King Viserys Targaryen, the First of His Name. "I never imagined in a million years I'd be playing a *king*. In any kingdom, never mind *this* one."

The sheer pinch-me-ness of the moment is understandable. For this kingdom (technically seven) is Westeros, previously visited in the titanically successful HBO series *Game Of Thrones*. However, this is not a Westeros we've seen before. That much is evident to Considine as he surveys his surroundings. His Iron Throne is bigger and, well, *swordier* than the one last seen in May 2019. Dozens more blades jab out of its imposing structure, while the steps below are also festooned with swords, hundreds of them, angrily poking towards the ceiling of this Great Hall. "It looks very, very impressive," a now wig-free Considine tells *Empire*, just over a year later. "I think people are gonna like it."

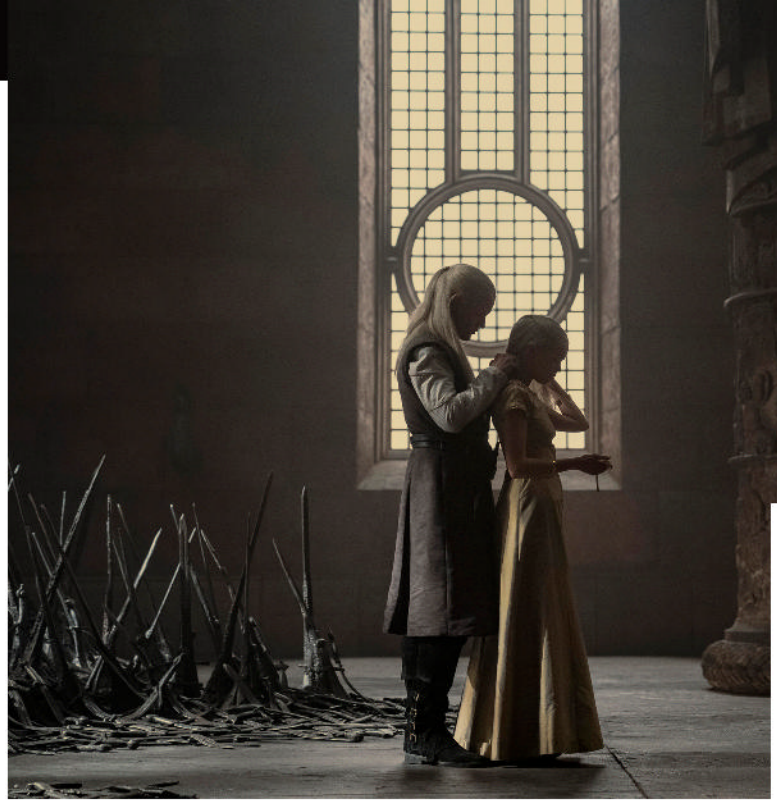
Sapochnik and his fellow showrunner Ryan J. Condal (as well as no doubt every executive at HBO) are certainly hoping that'll be true. After all, they've taken on the tough task of creating *House Of The Dragon*, the hugely ambitious prequel series to one of the most successful, beloved and epic TV series ever made. A successor show that promises to play a whole new, even deadlier, game.

"IT'S A TIME of greater decadence and influence," says Condal. "That's why the Iron Throne is dressed up so much grander. This particular story sees the Targaryens at the very apex of their wealth and power. I think that's a fascinating story to tell."

We didn't see much of House Targaryen in *Game Of Thrones*. There was Daenerys (Emilia Clarke), of course, mothering her trio of dragons across the Narrow Sea, plus her short-lived older brother (another Viserys, the last of his name,



Here: Paddy Considine as King Viserys Targaryen. **Right:** Showrunner Miguel Sapochnik with cast and crew on set.





Left: Daemon (Matt Smith) and Rhaenyra Targaryen (Milly Alcock). **Below, top to bottom:** King Jaehaerys Targaryen (Michael Carter) on the Iron Throne; Dragon's gonna dragon.





played by Harry Lloyd). But they were the final remnants of a fallen dynasty, genetically twisted by incest and thrown out of power with the usurpation of the mad king Aerys II. *House Of The Dragon* winds back the clock by about 170 years, to the family's golden age. Westeros has long since been conquered by these platinum-blond dragon-riders from the East, and they've secured peace in the realm for close to 60 years. However, as anyone who's read George R.R. Martin's 2018 book *Fire And Blood* (basically a sexed-up *Silmarillion*) will know, a storm is coming: 'The Dance Of The Dragons', a brutal internecine conflict between two rival Targaryen factions — and their many dragons — sparked by the issue of Viserys I's succession. Specifically, his lack of a male heir, and his progressive-but-divisive decision to promise the Iron Throne to his only child and daughter, Rhaenyra (played in the show by both Milly Alcock, as the Young Rhaenyra, and Emma D'Arcy).

Aptly, *House Of The Dragon* itself emerged from a problem of succession. "I remember when we were doing the press circuit for [*Game Of Thrones*] Season 8, they [HBO] were already talking about spin-offs," says Sapochnik, director of such celebrated *Thrones* episodes as 'Hardhome', 'Battle Of The Bastards' and 'The Long Night'. "At the time I mentioned to them, 'You should speak with Ryan Condal,' who I was developing a Conan [The Barbarian] project [for Amazon] with. They said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah,' and went forward with these five different writers: Max Borenstein, Carly Wray, Bryan Cogman, Jane Goldman and Brian Helgeland."

It was an impressive array of scriptwriting talent, and this successor-show bake-off was seemingly won by Goldman, whose prequel concept, working-titled 'Bloodmoon', was set thousands of years earlier in the Age Of Heroes and concerned the origin of the zombie-like White Walkers. A pilot starring Naomi Watts and Jamie Campbell Bower was shot in 2019. But, for reasons still unclear, 'Bloodmoon' failed to impress the HBO brass. "We never got told what the problems were," says Sapochnik.

It was during this time that his friend Condal phoned from the States and announced, "So I'm writing this 'Dance Of The Dragons' thing, and you're my first, second and third choice for director." In the meantime, it transpired, Condal had been contacted directly by George R.R. Martin. The two first became acquainted when Condal met the author back in 2012, while shooting his first pilot ("a supernatural Western") in Martin's hometown of Santa Fe. Condal had reached out to Martin as a fan ("I learned more about screenwriting from George's books than reading how-to books on screenwriting") and they'd stayed in touch ever since. Now, six years later, Martin had just finished *Fire And Blood*, though it wasn't yet published, and told Condal that an adaptation of its 'Dance Of The Dragons' segment was his "passion project".

"He hadn't quite found the right writer yet," Condal recalls. "He said, 'You know my books, I really like you, I like your writing. I'd like you to take a shot at this, and I'd like to tell HBO to hire you.' So I said, 'That's amazing.' And my head exploded." For Condal, this was "a dream job within a dream job".

However, Sapochnik was a little more ›



reserved. Firstly, he didn't want to merely direct; he wanted to partner with Condal as a showrunner, he tells *Empire* when we meet at *House Of The Dragon*'s post-production hub in London's Soho in early July, only a day or two after he's completed a fortnight of reshoots. Secondly, "From my perspective, it wasn't immediately interesting, because it was stuff I'd already worked on: basically the same thing, with more dragons. And dragons are a nightmare to shoot. But I liked Ryan, so I said I would help, and in the process see if I could find something for me in it."

Sapochnik was asking valid questions: why follow *Game Of Thrones* with just more *Game Of Thrones*? How could they make this show stand out? He would find his answer amid *House Of The Dragon*'s fascinating cast of characters.

"FUNDAMENTALLY, *HOUSE OF The Dragon* is a different animal," says Emma D'Arcy, previously seen in Frost/Pegg supernatural comedy *Truth Seekers* and now ready to make their mark as the grown-up Princess Rhaenyra (D'Arcy's preferred pronouns are they/them). "I think we'd be really naive if we tried to mimic or emulate *Game Of Thrones*. I think the thing that's distinct, and something I love about this season, is that it's really rooted in the home. It's domestic, it's psychological, it's interpersonal, it's familial."

Rhaenyra's closest childhood friend is Alicent Hightower, played as an adult by Olivia Cooke (*Ready Player One*, *Bates Motel*), who admits she felt "trepidation" at the idea of appearing in a *Thrones* follow-up, until she read the scripts. "It feels more intensely focused on one extended family, rather than many other families," she says. "It's much more nuclear than the other TV show, but still incredibly thrilling and intense and all the things we were excited about when we watched *Game Of Thrones*."

Alicent is the daughter of Otto Hightower (Rhys Ifans), the Hand of the King — "a high-flying political creature, a black belt in statecraft, a pragmatist and a manipulator," as Ifans puts it. Otto is pitted against Rhaenyra's uncle, Viserys' younger brother, whom he regards as "the king's kryptonite," Ifans says. "[He's] volatile, violent and impulsive. Any influence he has on the king is detrimental to the status quo."

This is Prince Daemon, played by Matt Smith, who of course has previous as a troublesome royal in the first two seasons of *The Crown*. "Daemon is there to cause chaos and piss people off because, simply, it entertains him," Smith tells *Empire*. "He and Otto loathe one another. They're winding each other up, needling one another. And in the middle of it is Paddy, who plays Viserys. They're both vying for his attention and his love."

This, as you'd imagine, is no picnic for the king, who is something we've rarely seen before in the world of *Thrones*: a good, well-meaning monarch. "He really shouldn't be king," says Considine. "He's not really cut out to be a ruler. He's a pleaser of people, but he feels a duty to his daughter, because she's the only living child he had with [his wife] Aemma, who died. He doesn't feel there's anybody else he can trust to succeed him. Certainly not his brother Daemon! But the job tears him apart, and it starts to take its toll physically and mentally on him." As it did on



Here: Daemon, younger brother of King Viserys, ready for battle. **Right:** Showrunner Ryan J. Condal — and scaly pal — on set.









Left: Rhys Ifans as Otto Hightower. **Below, top to bottom:** Steve Toussaint as Lord Corlys Velaryon; Milly Alcock and Emily Carey as Young Rhaenyra and Young Alicent.

Considine himself, to some degree. "I kept putting my hip out, because of how I was holding myself [as Viserys]," he laughs. "But, you know, you gotta do it, right?"

However, it was not Viserys' travails that drew Sapochnik into *House Of The Dragon*, nor the rivalry between his Hand and his brother. The true attraction came from a eureka moment, courtesy of Alexis Raben, both the development executive at Sapochnik's production company and his wife. (Raben also plays Talya in the show.) "One day, she said, 'This would be much more interesting if it was about the two main female characters, rather than the male characters; if you really focused in on the patriarchy's perception of women, and the fact that they'd rather destroy themselves than see a woman on the throne.' That wasn't a perspective I have ever told before. I think it made this show feel more contemporary, too. We said, 'What if Alicent is like "Women for Trump", and Rhaenyra's like punk rock?'"

It required beefing up the role of Alicent, who's not so prevalent in the book, and tracing the relationship between the two characters from childhood (Alicent is played as a child by Emily Carey). Cooke was particularly attracted to this idea of "how incredibly lonely it must be to be those two women, surrounded by men who just want to watch the world burn." Meanwhile, D'Arcy describes Rhaenyra and Alicent as "quasi siblings", with a deep, enmeshed history. "They grow up in the same backyard, which happens to be the royal court. But Alicent is better at conforming to the requirements of court manoeuvres, and Rhaenyra is humming with the fire of old Targaryenism. It's like an ally that lives inside her, and she has to learn when to dampen that fire and when to trust it. She's surrounded by a trail of ashes."

Empire wonders if this shift in perspective has drawn *House Of The Dragon* away from the explicit sex and violence that characterised its predecessor. Not at all, it turns out. "It's still really full-blooded, but it doesn't feel unnecessary," says Cooke. "I feel like the actors definitely have more of a say, and there's an intimacy coordinator, so [during the sex scenes] you feel protected as much as possible."

Condal insists the show very much continues the legacy of *Thrones* being "a very adult fantasy". When his four- and six-year-old daughters asked him how old they'd need to be to watch *House Of The Dragon*, he told them, "27," he laughs. "But I don't think there's anything gratuitous. It's a world where sex is used as a weapon and tradecraft. And we've used it to tell a story. It's not just there for shock and awe, and for gratuitousness' sake."

Of course, it is not only the "adult" side of *Game Of Thrones*' legacy that this new series must contend with. There is also the "fantasy" aspect. And it is here the show faced one of its greatest creative challenges: bringing to life all its flame-spewing monsters.

DURING *GAME OF Thrones*, we never see more dragons than Daenerys' three 'children', primarily her black-scaled alpha boy Drogon. In the era of *House Of The Dragon*, there are no fewer than 17 recorded fire-breathers darkening the skies, ›



with the majority of these bred by and bonded to the Targaryens. "There's a very symbiotic connection between the dragon rider and the dragon," explains Smith (who describes Daemon's own, Caraxes, as "a grumpy bastard"). "You've got to master it from an early age, and it's a death-defying experience trying to tame it. For want of a better analogy, it's a bit like *Avatar*."

Sapochnik confirms that, during the course of Season 1, we'll meet nine of these 17, which promise to complement the show's more focused, courtly set-up with some of the scale and spectacle viewers have come to expect from the saga. In other words, they'll be making the show 'nuclear' in a very different sense. However, creating all these magnificent beasts took the task of making *House Of the Dragon* familiar-but-different to a whole new level.

"I've got a book which has hundreds of dragon [concept] designs," says Sapochnik. "The first thing you want is *not* to do Drogon. So I came up with a whole theory about how there were three different kinds of dragons, based on their different skulls. We came up with all kinds of stuff. But in the end, we ended up back at Drogon," he laughs. "There's something about Drogon. It's like the Millennium Falcon. It hit something. But each new dragon has its own personality. That's what's going on now in our last part of the animation — we're applying personal character traits to each of the dragons. One of them's got a gimpy leg. Another one's much more like an eagle, because she's kind of neurotic. And another one's like a curmudgeonly old granny."

If (re)imagining dragons was a test for Sapochnik, for Condal it was a joy. "They were a blast!" he says. "They were the most fun to work with because they do everything you ask them to! I'm very excited to unleash dragons on the world."

They were fun to ride, too — according to D'Arcy, at least. "We had an animatronic buck, which is controlled by a device that the director can use to plan each flight path," they tell us. "Honestly, having done my first day on the buck, my takeaway was that every member of production ought to have the right to have a go. They should allot time slots. Someone can roast chestnuts out front. The most acting I had to do was to wipe the grin off my face, because I can't overstress how thrilling it is."

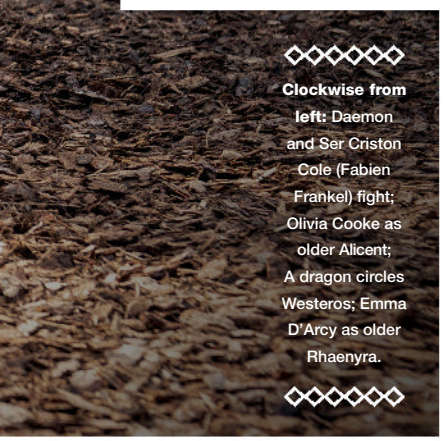
WHILE D'ARCY WAS flying high, their showrunners were aiming high. And necessarily so. You'd think both Condal and Sapochnik felt some degree of pressure at having to surpass, or at least match, the spectacular-yet-subversive experience that *Game Of Thrones* delivered. However, neither of them seems particularly anxious. "I always joke that Miguel and I are following The Beatles," says Condal. "But at least Miguel was one of The Beatles, at the end."

When *Empire* asks the "Beatle" if he's feeling any weight of expectation, he replies, "What, you mean following the thing I already did? No. I'm not." He harks back to starting work on *Game Of Thrones* Season 6 highlight 'Battle Of The Bastards' and how the production office was fretting about it needing to top Season 5's White Walker onslaught 'Hardhome' (also directed by Sapochnik). "Everyone kept saying, 'We've got to









Clockwise from left: Daemon and Ser Criston Cole (Fabien Frankel) fight; Olivia Cooke as older Alicent; A dragon circles Westeros; Emma D'Arcy as older Rhaenyra.



make sure it's bigger!' And I said, 'No. We've just got to do a good job. And if we do a good job, then it will speak for itself.'"

There is a flip side to any *Thrones*-based expectation. The show's final throes elicited a significant backlash from fans, especially those aghast at Daenerys' apparent 12th-hour turn towards city-nuking tyranny. Was there any sense of course correction here? Of needing to consider those who voiced dismay at the way the series ended?

"*Life* doesn't end the way you want it to!" says Sapochnik (who directed the very episode in which Dany torches King's Landing). "I think we very much wanted to pay attention to *not* that."

Condal concurs. "It doesn't really factor in at all," he says. "I think the minute you as a creator start playing defence, you're just taking the ground out from beneath your feet. Should we be so lucky to have such a large and passionate fanbase that will debate our show! I think that in itself is a sign of success."

Even so, he admits, there is a sense in which *House Of The Dragon* does address Daenerys' ultimate power-craziness — in a subtle, ancestral way. "Daenerys resurrected this idea that, when you're the only person in the world with nuclear weapons, you can either be a force for peace, or you can be a tyrant. And the line between those two things is very thin. That's definitely something this show will explore."

While George R.R. Martin's complete history of what happens to Rhaenyra, Alicent and all those troublesome patriarchs is available for anyone to read, nobody involved in its adaptation will discuss how far into 'The Dance Of The Dragons' these upcoming ten episodes will take us. At the time of writing, a second season has not even been confirmed. However, Sapochnik does provide a hint, describing this season as "an origin story of these characters and the build to why these people go to war." Whoever's sat on the Iron Throne at the conclusion of Episode 10, it feels safe to say that there will be much more fire and blood to come.

***HOUSE OF THE DRAGON* IS ON SKY ATLANTIC AND NOW FROM 22 AUGUST**

WATCH *and* BURN

THRONES' FIVE 'HOTTEST' DRAGON MOMENTS



HATCHED!

SEASON 1, EPISODE 10

The first season concludes with our first glimpse of a dragon — widdle baby Drogon clambering over his Mommy Daenerys' shoulder, after she climbed on her dead husband's funeral pyre with the three eggs. Sure, he and his slithery brothers are cute now, but it's all gonna end in tears. And flames.



"DRACARYS"

SEASON 3, EPISODE 4

Not the first time we see Dany's scaly kids napalm someone, but the most satisfying. After insulting the Khaleesi in Valyrian, chief Astaporian slaver Kraznys is surprised to learn she can speak the language fluently. Including the word "Dracarys", which she uses to execute Kraznys via dragonfire.



DANY ROASTS THE LANNISTERS

SEASON 7, EPISODE 4

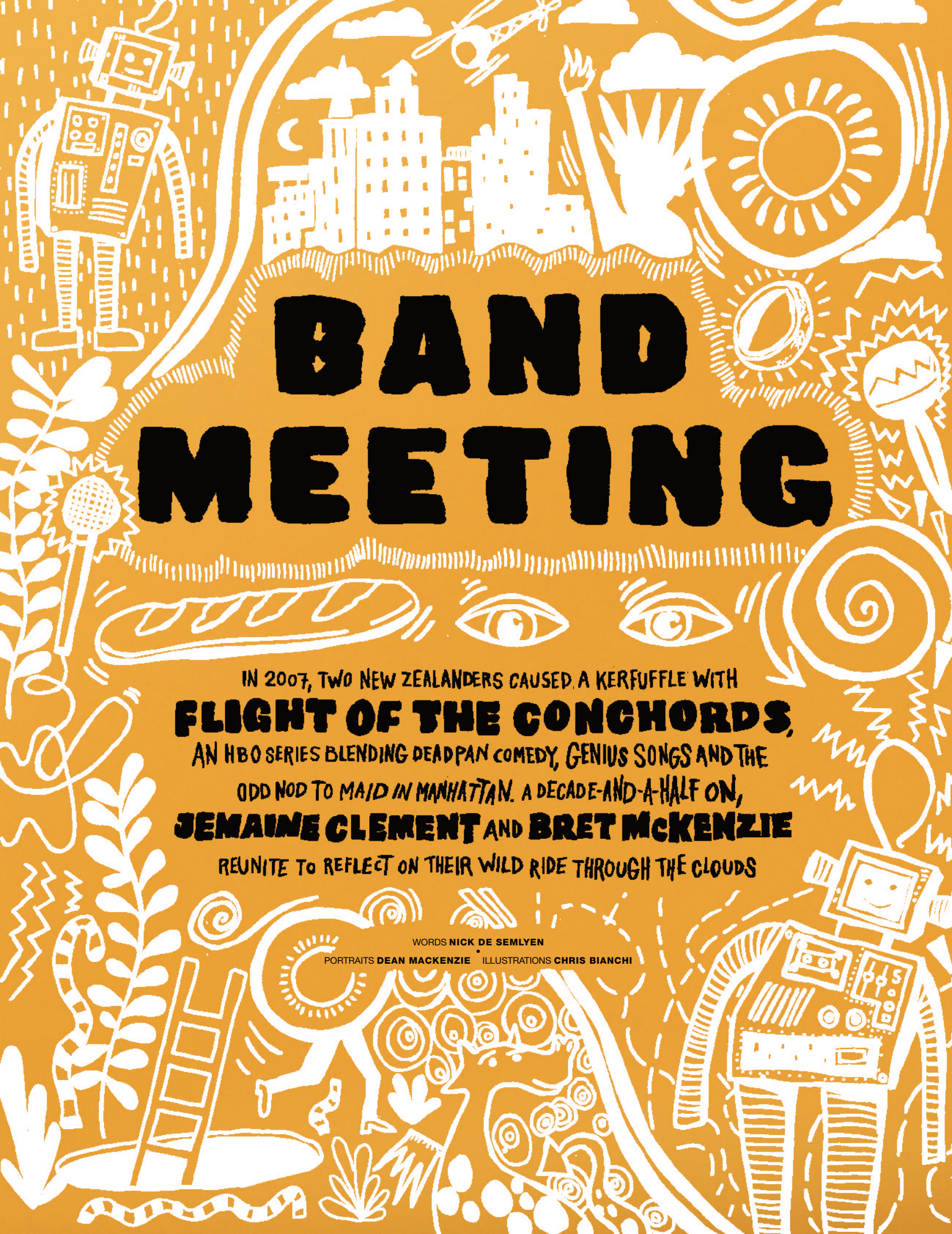
With the dragons in full-on war mode, there's something particularly gratifying about watching Drogon attacking Lannisters, and hitting them where it hurts (their coffers). Plus there's that awesome supply-train-burning money-shot, and the scene where Jaime charges at Drogon like a knight of old… before getting pushed into a river.



MELTING THE IRON THRONE

SEASON 8, EPISODE 6

The final season concludes with Daenerys going full mad-tyrant, causing her nephew-lover Jon Snow to shiv her in the throne room. Last drake standing Drogon ain't happy, but his fiery strop is aimed not at the Targaryen-blooded Jon, but the Iron Throne itself. Dragons, it seems, are not dumb beasts; they appreciate a good metaphor, including one that marks the end of Targaryen rule.



BAND MEETING

IN 2007, TWO NEW ZEALANDERS CAUSED A KERFUFFLE WITH **FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS**, AN HBO SERIES BLENDING DEADPAN COMEDY, GENIUS SONGS AND THE ODD NOD TO *MAID IN MANHATTAN*. A DECADE-AND-A-HALF ON, **JEMAINE CLEMENT** AND **BRET McKENZIE** REUNITE TO REFLECT ON THEIR WILD RIDE THROUGH THE CLOUDS

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**
PORTRAITS **DEAN MACKENZIE** • ILLUSTRATIONS **CHRIS BIANCHI**



Jemaine Clement
and Bret McKenzie,
photographed exclusively
for *Empire* in Wellington,
New Zealand, on 30 June 2022.

Bret? Present. Jemaine? Present.

Yes, in a logistical feat worthy of Murray, the amiably shambolic band manager played by Rhys Darby who wrangles them in *Flight Of The Conchords*, *Empire* has brought together Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement for a celebration of their now 15-year-old HBO show. In fact, we've done it twice. In Wellington in late June, the Kiwi comics worked it for a photoshoot. Then, a couple of weeks later, we bring them together on a Zoom call, McKenzie still in Wellington but about to embark on a world tour for his debut solo album, Clement now on holiday in a small village in Greece.

These days they only hang out once every few months, and they've not done a paired interview for a while, but they're happy to get the band back together to reminisce about the TV show that changed their lives. Following the lives of struggling musicians called Bret and Jemaine in New York, with but a single fan, *Flight Of The Conchords* was a breath of small-screen fresh air. Its deadpan heroes endure all manner of hilarious indignities in their pursuit of love and success (complaining about a gig in a public library, Bret bemoans, "It's so hard to play there, because everyone wants us to be quiet"). And in a plethora of joyously creative fantasy sequences, the duo perform earwormy comedy songs, from self-deprecating sex jam 'Business Time' to the exceedingly French 'Foux Du Fafa' ("Gérard Depardieu/ Baguette/Hon hon hon") via rap battles, R&B ballads and cosmic tributes to David Bowie.

On screen, they failed relentlessly. In real life, they were a triumph. Wrapping up the show after just two seasons, McKenzie and Clement hurtled on to a host of Hollywood adventures: the former winning a Best Original Song Oscar for *The Muppets* and playing elf Lindir in the first *Hobbit* film; the latter taking on villain duties in *Men In Black 3*, voicing a crab in *Moana* and bagging a role in the upcoming *Avatar* sequels. They're busy guys. But not too busy to tell us about the time they were the opening act for Gollum.

Is it true that in your early days you wound up performing your *Lord Of The Rings*-spoofing song, 'Frodo (Don't Wear The Ring)', to the actual cast of *The Lord Of The Rings*?

Bret McKenzie: Oh, yeah. We did it for their wrap party.









Top to bottom: Hawking for a toothpaste company in 'A Good Opportunity'; Jemaine space-suited up in 'Bowie'; Bret sings about his, uh, 'sugar lumps' in 'The New Cup'; The duo try to rock the house in a public library in the same episode.

Jemaine Clement: It was for either *The Two Towers* or *The Return Of The King*. We hadn't done the show then, so they didn't know who we were. And we hadn't seen the movie — all the things in the song were from the trailer. We'd just played it at a club, and someone on the crew had seen it.

McKenzie: It was Friday-night drinks in the studio where they were filming, and we stood on the side of a papier-mâché mountain and sang. It was a pretty weird gig, actually.

Clement: But it was good. They all came up to us and Ian McKellen said, "Very good. Very good."

McKenzie: He was a big supporter.

Clement: So was Elijah Wood. The other great thing about that gig is that Andy Serkis got on after us and did a rap battle as Gollum and Sméagol. Which was pretty special.

Let's rewind. You met in Wellington and started a band together, once described as "New Zealand's fourth-most-popular guitar-based, digi-bongo, a cappella-rap-funk-comedy folk duo". When did it occur to you to mix music and comedy?

McKenzie: Well, we weren't very good at playing other people's songs. And we didn't know many chords. So we just started making songs that were one, two and three chords.

Clement: Our first song had one chord. It's called 'Rock Beat'.

McKenzie: It was just E.

Clement: Yeah, E7. We actually play it briefly in the TV show: "I pulled a muscle last night/ Dancing to a rock beat." And 'Foux Du Fafa' is two chords.

McKenzie: One of the first gigs I remember, we played 'Foux Du Fafa' with a double-bass player and a trumpet player.

Clement: People kind of went crazy. They were like, "More! More!" But we didn't have any more. We only had that one.

McKenzie: We left them wanting more. [*Laughs*] It was a good technique.

In the show, your characters wind up performing in some soul-crushing scenarios. How much of that came from your own experiences?

Clement: The show is kind of us in our early thirties, re-enacting our lives in our early twenties. There's an episode we did where we ›

Previous page: Bret - Coat: Adrion Atelier. Roll-neck: Standard Issue. Trousers: Zambesi. Socks: SOCKSSS, from Good As Gold. Vintage shoes: Hunters & Collectors. Jemaine - Blazer: Lardini, from Edit. Trousers: Cellar Door, from Edit. Rollneck: Cos. Socks, Positive Messages, from Good As Gold. Vintage shoes: Hunters & Collectors. This page: Jacket: Zambesi. Pants: R.M. Williams. Vintage shirt: Tangent & Company. Socks: SOCKSSS, from Good As Gold. Vintage shoes: Hunters & Collectors.







play to one person and that person has left during the show. And that's based on playing Vancouver. We did also have some bad corporate gigs.

McKenzie: Corporate gigs are very tough. We played a function for a local cricket club, a pretty boozy event. And some of the people just pushed us off the stage and took over, because they were so disappointed by our songs.

Clement: I remember they asked for [Kenny Rogers'] 'The Gambler'. And Bret does not know 'The Gambler', but he knew the chorus and he tried to sing it. To Bret's credit, the audience were singing along with him and he had it going while I was trying to pack up all our equipment. [*Laughs*] It was very like the scene in *The Blues Brothers* where they have to play the country bar. But we didn't have the protection of chicken wire.

McKenzie: We left them singing a cappella and ran away.

Clement: Our first songs were all about break-ups. And we did a stag do, so instead of a stripper it was me and Bret singing our songs about break-ups. I think we just depressed the potential groom.

McKenzie: There were a lot of good gigs around those, though. At the Thursday-night comedy night in Wellington, we had a great response. Even though the audience was maybe 15 to 30 people, they were very enthusiastic.

Clement: The first one where it seemed like it could be something was when we played that French song, in that crowded fringe-festival room in Wellington. They were so excited that it seemed like, "You know, this could be a thing."

In reviews of *Flight Of The Conchords*, the two of you have been compared to *Sesame Street*'s Bert and Ernie. Which of you is which, do you think?

Clement: James Bobin, who was our director and the third creator of the show, talked about setting up the bedroom like Bert and Ernie, with the two beds. I think in the show I'm more Bert, and Bret's more Ernie. It might just be two Berts. [*Laughs*] What was different about what







we were doing for a comedy duo is that usually there's a straight guy and a funny guy... and we're two straight guys.

McKenzie: At comedy festivals, usually the duos would go against each other a lot. And we didn't. We played a different style: just these sort of friendly guys, supporting each other.

Clement: We used to try and play characters for our first couple of gigs — like, we'd pretend we were French, or rock stars. But we gave it up

Left, top to bottom: The pair with manager Murray (Rhys Darby) in 'Unnatural Love'; A *West Side Story* riff as Bret starts a street gang in 'The Tough Brets'; Jemaine strums in his Bert and Ernie-style bed in 'Unnatural Love'; Lone Conchords fan Mel (Kristen Schaal), rocking a homemade Jemaine T-shirt in 'Mugged'.

pretty quickly and became closer to what we're like. But even more boring.

McKenzie: If you were writing the show for TV, without it existing as a stand-up show, you'd probably draw the characters more distinctly. The fact they were a little amorphous made it hard for executives to see it as a TV show. But it also made it a little hard to pin down what's going on in the world of the show, which probably gave us the longevity. Like, "Who are these guys? What's happening?"

There were false starts on your way to TV: a New Zealand sitcom and an LA-set NBC show that fell through. Then HBO took a chance on you. Did you have to fight to make the show the way you wanted?

McKenzie: With HBO, they were at the time making *Entourage*. And they had a few other big-budget shows. We were literally, like, so far down the list of their priorities. And it was really small-budget. One time we were filming in a park in Brooklyn, and people walked past and said, "Oh, is this a student film?" And we're like, "No, no, this is an HBO show!" [*Laughs*] There wasn't a lo-fi aesthetic to the show — there was a lo-fi aesthetic to the HBO budget. And so there was very little pressure from them, that I felt anyway.

Clement: Also, when we got this deal, we didn't know what any of this was. We didn't know what HBO was.

McKenzie: I'd heard of *The Sopranos*.

Clement: But we didn't have that channel in New Zealand. And we'd never really been to New York. When we were writing the pilot, we'd only spent three days there. We were writing this show set in New York and we didn't really know what it was like. But HBO were the dream, really. We just lucked into the best place. And I haven't had it quite as magical again.

McKenzie: I've had more notes working on shows that haven't been made than we did on *Flight Of The Conchords*.

Were there any notes at all?

McKenzie: The only thing I remember was they leaned over to James Bobin and said, "Is Bret going to have a haircut?" And James said, "He just had a haircut." [*Laughs*]

Clement: And then when we started Season 2, they gave us a note saying, "The hair is too short. Let the hair grow long."

McKenzie: I think maybe Bobin was fielding some more notes, but nothing big. I mean, I think it was pretty hard to pin down what the show was early on. There wasn't a model they were basing it on. So it wasn't like, "It needs to be more like this." There weren't any rules.

Shooting your first season was by all accounts arduous...

Clement: We did a pilot first, in the summer. And we were in a real apartment that was

›

Blazer: Lardini, from Edit. Rollneck: Cos.

Right, top to bottom: Performing 'Too Many Dicks On The Dancefloor', alongside the eccentric Dave (Arj Barker), in 'Unnatural Love'; Picnicking during the 'Foux Du Fafa' interlude in 'Girlfriends'; Swashbuckling in 'Love Is A Weapon Of Choice', which sees them both fall for Kristen Wiig; Perfectly in sync in 'Yoko'.









often used in shows as a drug dealer's apartment or a gang's headquarters. And it was baking hot and we couldn't put fans on and we were sweating. I remember one of our first reviews complained about how sweaty we were.
McKenzie: "Those sweaty musicians!"
Clement: It was about 40 degrees, and we're filming with all these lights in this tiny real apartment. And then the next episode we filmed six months later, in the middle of winter. And I remember it being one of the coldest days on record, and a runner asking us if we wanted water. We said yes. And they brought it to us and it was frozen solid. [*Laughs*]
McKenzie: It's that classic thing on set where they say, "Can you make it look like it's summer?" So you're wearing T-shirts, and we're breathing and you can see the smoke coming out because it's so cold.
Clement: That's when I got pneumonia. But it started snowing fortunately so then they couldn't pretend it was summer anymore. We were allowed to wear jackets when it snowed. I love James Bobin so much, but that's the only thing I ever get mad at him about: "He wouldn't let us wear jackets!"

How about the songs? Most of the series has a laidback quality, but those sequences are very elaborately produced.
McKenzie: We had five days to shoot an episode. For four days we would shoot the [dialogue] scenes, and then on the other day we would shoot two songs. So the music clips were very quick-moving. There was a desperation to getting the shots. We just did a couple of takes and were like, "Okay, we've got to get to another set..."
Clement: We would use the weekends to record the songs. That was the tricky part: we worked seven days, every week. That was the part that was tiring for us, and ultimately led to us deciding not to do it anymore. I remember Bret kept a tally of how many days we had without a day off. And our longest work week was 110 days.
McKenzie: We should have started a union.
Clement: A comedy musicians writers' union?
McKenzie: Yeah, just us, Tenacious D and "Weird Al" Yankovic in a union, demanding more time. [*Laughs*] It was stressful. There was one song where Jemaine had a rap part and we hadn't written it. So Jemaine said, "I'm going to wear a mask, so that way you can't see the rap." Because the rap didn't exist!
Clement: It was 'I Told You I Was Freaky'. And I don't think we ended up putting the rap in, in the end.

Despite all the pain, the show became hugely popular. How did your lives change?
McKenzie: There was such a massive change from the first season, where we could just film on the street — in fact, people would tell us to get out of the way. And then very quickly with the second season it became a little more difficult to film on the street. At nights, if you would go out when people were drunk, it was quite crazy.
Clement: It completely changed our lives. It was quite intense. And in New Zealand, even — I remember us walking past a restaurant and the staff started coming out and following us. In Florida, this guy on the beach went, "Jemaine, when's Season 3 coming out, man?" I was like, "We don't think we're doing a Season 3." He went, "WHAT THE FUCK?" [*Laughs*] The best compliment I remember was a guy going, "You're Flight Of The Conchords? I love that shit and I'm a *gangster*."
McKenzie: One thing that was really surreal was coming from New Zealand, which obviously is a long way from Hollywood, and meeting people you never thought you would meet. You never thought they would see or hear these songs. I remember seeing one clip of Snoop Dogg singing along and chuckling away to 'If You're Into It', which he posted. And it was just so surreal seeing something we'd written for these Thursday-night comedy clubs, now Snoop Dogg is singing along to it. Those worlds colliding is a really fun thing to have happen to you.

Jemaine, you're in the *Avatar* sequels. Is James Cameron a Conchords fan?
Clement: Yeah, he liked the show. And Steven Spielberg. I worked with him and he said, "You guys changed comedy in America." I don't know if I would have said that. But that's what he said. So he must be right, Steven Spielberg.
McKenzie: I feel incredibly lucky that we managed to make something that we're proud of and was well-received. I feel like it's given me credibility in the industry that it's hard to get. It's been quite amazing.

It's a show with big intergenerational appeal, too — the rare HBO show that can be enjoyed by children.
McKenzie: Lots of friends do play it to their kids.
Clement: There's not a lot of shows that appeal to kids *and* gangsters. [*Laughs*] A couple of days ago, I bumped into a young guy at a store in Athens and he said he learned English from the show. Two people have told me that this week in Greece, that they learned English from the show.
McKenzie: How is their English?
Clement: Terrible!

Bret - Jacket: Zambesi. Pants: R.M. Williams. Vintage shirt: Tangent & Company. Socks: SOCKSSS, from Good As Gold. Vintage shoes: Hunters & Collectors. Jemaine - Jacket: Zambesi. Shirt: Samsøe Samsøe, from Caughley. Cardigan: Wood Wood, from Good As Gold.Vintage trousers: Hunters & Collectors. Socks: Positive Messages, from Good As Gold.Vintage shoes: Hunters & Collectors.Styling: Chloë Hill. Fashion Assistant: Josh Moran. Grooming: Michelle Triggers. Additional imagery: Seac/Sky


RHYMEN·CER
HIPPOPOTAM





FIGHT TO THE FINISH

VIOLA DAVIS AND DIRECTOR GINA PRINCE-BYTHEWOOD JOIN FORCES TO GIVE US A HISTORICAL EPIC LIKE NO OTHER:

THE WOMAN KING

AKA "THE WEST AFRICAN *BRAVEHEART*"...

WORDS **AMON WARMANN**



"THE MOST DISRESPECTED PERSON IN AMERICA IS THE BLACK WOMAN..."

The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman." Those are the words of Malcolm X, quoted to *Empire* by Gina Prince-Bythewood, director of *Love & Basketball* and *The Old Guard*. "He said that in the '60s," she tells us. "In terms of our industry, that's still true today." Perhaps after *The Woman King* — Prince-Bythewood's biggest, most ambitious movie yet — that may be less true of tomorrow.

Films centred around Black women have historically been the hardest to make in Hollywood. However, (very) slowly but surely, times are changing. In part, that's thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement, which has forced studios to think a little harder about who they put behind and in front of the camera, and what stories they tell. But we can also thank *Black Panther*, a billion-dollar-grossing superhero film that proved Black films sell, and in so doing changed the Hollywood landscape forever.

Now Prince-Bythewood, in close collaboration with producer-star Viola Davis, is set to break further new ground with *The Woman King*: a story described by producer Cathy Schulman as "the West African *Braveheart*" — a comparison enthusiastically echoed by its director. "It felt like *our Braveheart*," Prince-Bythewood declares. "*Braveheart* is one of my favourite movies. But we don't get to see ourselves like that." Their story is centred around the Agojie (or "Amazons"): dark-skinned Black women warriors from the 1800s, who are being brought to vivid, authentic life by a cast pulled from all over the diaspora and a director who feels like her entire career has been building to this moment. This is something we've never seen before, and it's been a long time coming.

"*Black Panther* was very much a movie where the audience was asked to imagine what would happen if there could be this great African nation that had its own agency," says Schulman. "What's interesting about *The Woman King* is that we don't have to imagine it. It actually happened!"

The connection between the Agojie — one of history's first all-female military forces, trained to embrace pain rather than fear it — and *Black Panther*'s Dora Milaje (the elite all-female unit tasked with protecting the Wakandan monarch) is plain to see. As *No Time To Die* star Lashana Lynch, who auditioned for a role in *Black Panther* and in *The Woman King* plays Agojie lieutenant Izogie, puts it: "I've just happened to get an opportunity to play [one of] the women that inspired such stories as *Black Panther*." Ryan Coogler's blockbuster paved the way for *The Woman King*, but it itself was hugely influenced by the history that drives Prince-Bythewood's film. It's all come full circle.



Clockwise from above: Viola Davis and director Gina Prince-Bythewood on set; Izogie (Lashana Lynch) gets stuck in; King Ghezo (John Boyega) with General Nanisca (Davis).

Most importantly, however, *The Woman King* is a testament to the innate power of Black women. Much of what they've been told about themselves on cinema screens has been negative, through backward stereotypes of being too ghetto, too loud, and too uneducated. But Davis has a strong message for any Black woman who's ever felt like they were invisible.

"This movie is my response to that," she tells *Empire*. "This movie is not even my respectful response to that. It is an illustration of the insurmountable beauty, strength, vulnerability, femininity, and absolute power of the dark-skinned Black woman. It's our way of redefining who we are. And I believe

from the first moment you enter this movie, you will see that in a very beautiful way."

THE SEED FOR *The Woman King* was planted in Davis' mind in 2015. She was at the Skirball Cultural Center's National Women's History Museum in Los Angeles to accept an award, when her friend and producer Maria Bello introduced her to the stage. "She said, 'Wouldn't you all like to see Viola Davis as an Agojie warrior, the leader of an all-female military unit?'" Davis recalls. "Everyone in the audience stood up and cheered. And then seven years later, here we are."

Davis is a "huge reason" why Prince-Bythewood came aboard. "I don't know a director who doesn't dream of working with her," she says. "She is everything you hoped she would be." The director was in post-production for 2020's *The Old Guard* (also a female-led action film) when Dana Stevens' script for *The Woman King* landed on her desk. ›









Clockwise from far left: Prince-Bythewood (centre) with cast and crew on set in South Africa; Thuso Mbedu as new recruit Nawi; Sheila Atim as Lieutenant Amenza; On the lookout; General Nanisca and Lieutenant Izogie with the Agojie army newcomers.

Prince-Bythewood had been planning on taking some time off to write a personal, smaller-scale story. But this was an opportunity she couldn't pass up. "I make my choices based on 'have to', not 'want to'," she states. "This was one I *had* to do, so it took precedence over everything."

Stevens' epic narrative focuses on the army of women warriors who defended the West African kingdom of Dahomey from the 17th to the 19th century. Set in 1823, *The Woman King* sees them fighting back against the neighbouring Oyo Empire, which has been exploiting their people and selling them into slavery in Europe.

Davis' Nanisca is an amalgamation of Agojie leaders who lived at the time, with all the gravitas and steeliness you'd expect from a general preparing her troops for war — and, thanks to Davis' regimen of intense training and clean eating, the physical presence to boot. It was a tough role for the Oscar-winner, not only in terms of its physical demands, but also because it required her, in a sense, to find her inner drill sergeant. "I think it's very hard to train a group of young women to suck up their vulnerability in order to fight," she says. "To dig deep and find that warrior spirit that understands you have to fight for something bigger than yourself — and that it may cost you your life. That was difficult for me."

Prince-Bythewood has always been a director with an eye for spotlighting Black women on the rise, such as Sanaa Lathan in 2000's *Love & Basketball* or Gugu Mbatha-Raw in *Beyond The Lights*. So to fill out Nanisca's squad of fighters, Prince-Bythewood put together a crack ensemble of upcoming talent, drawn from America, the UK and Africa.

Joining Davis and Lynch (who describes Izogie as "your worst gym trainer in the world, but a good soul!") is *The Underground Railroad*'s Thuso Mbedu as Nawi, the newest Agojie recruit. All her life, Nawi has dreamt of joining the Agojie army. "She thinks she has it figured out, but she actually doesn't," says Mbedu. "She's got a lot of lessons to learn." Nawi butts heads with Adrienne Warren's Ode, a fellow Agojie trainee with a chip on her shoulder due to being the only recruit from a neighbouring tribe. "They're both trying to find themselves in this intense atmosphere, so Ode becomes an accidental foe for Nawi," Warren says.

Nanisca's foe on the battlefield, meanwhile, proved a tricky casting challenge — how do you find someone who can convincingly go toe-to-toe with an actor as powerful as Davis? After an initially fruitless search, Prince-Bythewood eventually found her man only a week before shooting began, when Nigerian actor Jimmy Odukoya sent in a tape. As Oba Abua, an imposing Oyo General out to destroy the Dahomey Empire and the Agojie along with it, "he doesn't even have to open his mouth," the director says. "He's got a stature that really serves the character well."

And at the centre of it all is John Boyega's King Ghezo. It's not typical for the monarch to be in the background of a film like this, least of all one who yields the screen largely to the women. It required a particular actor to pull it off, and after Prince-Bythewood saw Boyega's viral speech at a Black Lives Matter rally in the UK, during which he noted how important it was for Black women to be supported and protected, she sought him out. He was happy to sign on. "I really wanted to be part of it," he says. "Because it's historic to see Black women being portrayed in this way."

WE DON'T HAVE to wait long to feel the Agojie's physicality come through the screen. An early sequence sees them stealthily approach an enemy camp before attacking their foes with skill and purpose. It's truly striking to watch several dark-skinned warrior women working completely in sync as they prepare their assault.

That first skirmish is only a taster for what follows in a combat-heavy movie, which builds to a climactic battle between the Dahomey and Oyo Empires. It took 11 days to film this sequence in the sweltering heat of South Africa, where the entire movie was shot. For Prince-Bythewood, it was a thrilling opportunity to mount her own version of the big-screen conflicts she loves to watch. "I just thought about all those great battles in *Braveheart* or *Gladiator*," she says. "And now we get to do ours. On paper, it's a ten-page sequence. We had thousands of extras clashing with each other in an epic David versus Goliath battle that's one of my favourite sequences in the film."

To achieve authenticity during the battle scenes, all the Agojie actors were required to perform as many of their own stunts as possible, and as such underwent intense training. This preparation encompassed everything from sprinting to weightlifting to martial arts lessons. "Though I've done stunts before, I've never had the chance to do my own stunts completely," says Lynch. "From start to finish, I did not want my stunt double to have one breath."

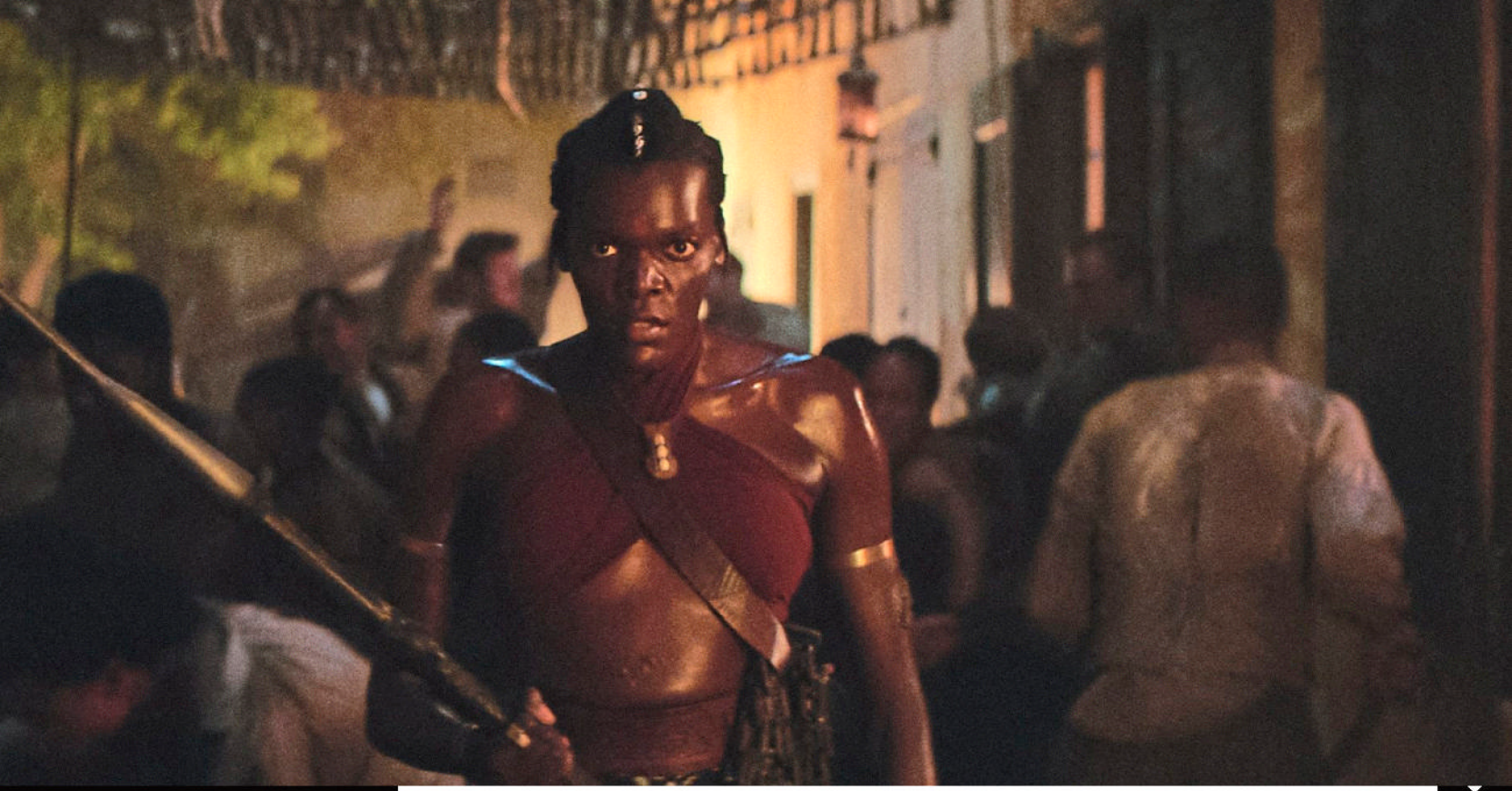
It was gruelling, but the women had each other's backs. "We lifted each other up on days when we quite literally wanted to vomit, but knew we weren't allowed to," Lynch recalls. "Nobody wanted to let the side down."



For her part, Prince-Bythewood consulted the history books to learn how the Agojie became one of the most fearsome fighting forces the world has ever seen. "We were always thinking, 'How far can we push it?' It's the 1800s, but how can we make it as cool as the stuff that you're watching in modern-day action films?"

Giving each Agojie warrior their own signature weapon was one answer to this question. For Mbedu's Nawi, "There's a theme









that runs through the movie about the use of a rope as a weapon, and there's an incredible sequence with that," promises Prince-Bythewood. For Izogie, it was something a little more specialised: razor-sharp fingernails. "The nails are incredible," Lynch confirms. "When I learned she had nails, I wanted everything to be a weapon. Her hands, her elbows... I wanted her to just be a complete warrior at all minutes of the day."

One of the most striking warriors in the army is Sheila Atim's Amenza, an Agojie lieutenant, who is also Nanisca's best friend and a religious advisor to King Ghezo. "What was great about working with our fight coordinators is that they worked very closely with me on the spear stuff specifically, to make it bespoke," she says. "We constantly had to keep telling the stunt performers on set to move back!" These aren't women to be trifled with.

THERE IS A VERSION of *The Woman King* that could have just been about dark-skinned women who are bad-ass warriors. But shortly before *The Woman King* was due to shoot, an interview with Agojie descendants landed in *The Washington Post*. They had no idea that a movie about their ancestors was on the horizon, but they hoped their story would be respectfully told, and that it would be about more than their foremothers being Amazonian heroes. It's a sentiment that Prince-Bythewood took to heart. "We wanted to show these women as whole women. Their vulnerability was as important as their fierceness, and they had an incredible sisterhood."

This sisterhood was felt by the actors as well. So often, they're used to being the only Black woman on set. That was far from the case here, and they capitalised on this sadly rare opportunity to revel in each other's company. "We're often pitted against each other in this industry, because apparently there's not enough room for all of us," says Warren. "And I simply think that is just not true. This experience gave me an opportunity to sit back, learn from [the other actors], have them learn from me, and also to just be in the same space with them, which I will hold so true and dear to my heart forever."

It's a moment that wasn't lost on Boyega either, who says he had an "out-of-body experience" on set. "I was just looking at all these dark-skinned Black women. There were so many. And these are not just supporting characters to a white character's vision. This is not just the best friend. These are the stars of the movies."

The result is a movie that everyone involved has been dreaming they'd see from a big Hollywood production for most of their lives. If something like *The Woman King* had been released when she was a child, "I would be at the cinema weekly, begging my parents to go and see this so I could get my fill of what I need to be me and to be seen," says Lynch.

Much like *Black Panther* helped get *The Woman King* greenlit, so too might this film inspire Hollywood to make more big-scale movies about Black women. "Success begets success," says Prince-Bythewood. "And we just need to keep having the opportunities — not just to tell stories of Black women, but to have Black women telling the stories of Black women."

Davis describes *The Woman King* as her "magnum opus", and it's easy to see why. She is an actor at the height of her powers, playing the embodiment of everything she's ever hoped to see from anyone who looks like her on screen. And she is also a fiercely protective producer. "I didn't want to put this story in the hands of someone else," she says.

It's taken seven years to get here, but Davis might just be about to receive another standing ovation — one that should reverberate for years to come.

***THE WOMAN KING* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 4 OCTOBER**


NO RETREAT



Scott Adkins, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in Sutton Park, Sutton Coldfield, on 24 March 2022.

NO SURRENDER

FOR TWO DECADES, SCOTT ADKINS HAS BEEN KICKING ASS, TAKING NAMES... AND BECOMING A CULT ACTION HERO. NOW, HE WANTS MORE. AS HE TELLS US, THERE IS NO PLAN B

WORDS **AL HORNER**

PHOTOGRAPHY **HAMISH BROWN**

SCOTT ADKINS

HAS SMASHED HIS BODY AGAINST CONCRETE AND SPLINTERED HIS SHINS.

He's drop-kicked men on moving motorcycles, twisted his back unleashing outrageous flips, and given as good as he's got in punishing fist-fights (and we do mean punishing, considering he once accidentally ripped Dolph Lundgren's bicep tendon clean from the bone). He regularly spends nights awake, too sore from shooting action sequences to sleep, with hours ticking until it's time to wake up and do it all again. "And all that has been the easy part," he grins, before vaulting over a park bench to the gasps of nearby dog-walkers. It's a sunny day in Sutton Coldfield, the Midlands town the cult hero calls home, where our *Empire* photo shoot is drawing intrigued looks. "Who's that?" one passer-by enquires. "Scott Adkins," *Empire* informs them, as the actor insists on taking the shot again, this time sailing over the bench with a kung-fu kick. "He's very impressive!" the passer-by replies, before gingerly adding: "... Should I know who he is?" And, well, isn't that the question?

Adkins is an icon among action aficionados. Since 2001, he's starred in a staggering 61 films, most of them lean, low-budget, straight-to-video martial-arts bruisers, with titles like *Avengement*, *Unleashed* and *Re-Kill*. Not all 61 are winners — "I've gotta admit, some of them are shit," he laughs — but his name on a poster is now a promise, that brutal, breathless combat is about to descend on your screen. Almost three million action devotees follow him on Instagram, and he's been described as "the LeBron James of kicking people" — an assessment with which plenty of legends appear to agree. Chan, Stallone, Van Damme and Jet Li are just a few of the action veterans to have gone toe-to-toe (or more accurately, foot-to-face) with the Brummie black belt, whose fighting style and preference for practical stunts hark back to the heydays of those titans. "I'm trying to keep that flame alive, because those are the movies I grew up loving," explains the actor. "When people go to watch a Scott Adkins movie, I want them to know they're watching the real thing."

But for all the admiration his name commands in the action community, Adkins remains little known outside his niche. If you're an action fan, you'll likely recognise him from his scene-stealing feats in franchises like *Undisputed* and *Universal Soldier*. If you're not, you may be wondering the same thing as the aforementioned Border Collie owner in Sutton Coldfield: should I know who Scott Adkins is?

"I want to be a household name," says the star. "I've done a lot of movies that have pigeonholed me. Now's all about getting to that next level." For 22 years, he's torn ligaments and slipped discs in service of his childhood dream of being a Jason Statham-stature household name. He's certainly getting closer: after a succession of bit-parts in major Hollywood movies like *The Bourne Ultimatum*, *Doctor Strange* and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, he is now getting more attention, co-starring alongside Jamie Foxx in Netflix horror-comedy *Day Shift*, and opposite Keanu Reeves in next year's *John Wick: Chapter 4*.

Getting to this point has meant enduring hardships even greater than physical aches and pains (he wasn't kidding about those being the easy part). "There have been real lows. Things that no-one talks about," he tells *Empire*, opening up about the psychological side of surviving in an industry that at times has felt stacked against him. "It takes a toll on you. I've gotta stay upbeat about it, 'cause what other choice do I have? You hear a lot of actors saying, 'I knew inside I was going to make it.' But I never felt that way. What I felt was shit-scared that I would fail."

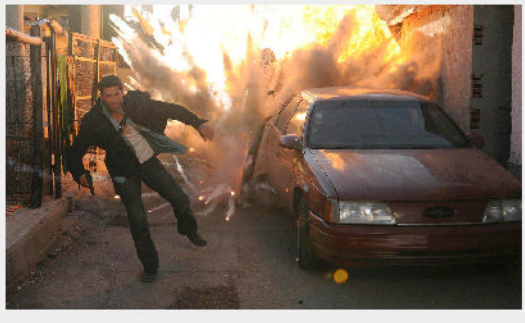
This is the story of an action hero who has got back up each time he's been knocked down in his gruelling journey to the summit of action cinema. What happens next, as he aims to elevate beyond his cult-hero status into mainstream glory, depends on a few questions. Is there still space in Hollywood for an actor like Adkins? Will his reputation as an action-cinema journeyman count against him as he tries to transform himself into a blockbuster lead? And, more pressingly, at 46, will he get the shot he craves, before his body starts to succumb to two decades of scrapes and injuries? "I don't know if I'm gonna make it," he admits. "But I fucking know I'm gonna put all my eggs in that basket anyways."

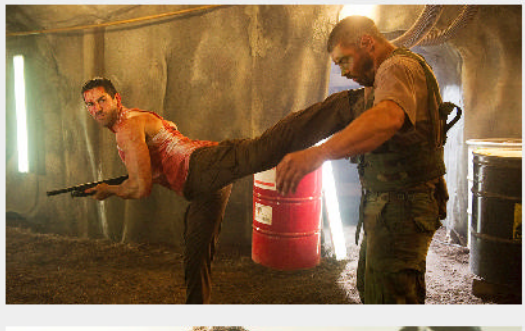
What's the worst thing that could happen hours before you're due to fight Jason Statham in a freezing-cold Bulgarian aircraft hangar? In September 2011, Adkins found out. "I stepped out of the shower that morning and a piece of my meniscus" — the cushion between the shin bone and thigh bone — "flipped inside my knee," winces the actor, recalling his unfortunate experience making *The Expendables 2*. "It was hanging outside my knee, under my skin. I could barely stand, but had to power through and get through the scene on adrenaline. For 12 hours. Against Jason Statham," he laughs. "It was fucking agony."

It all began a few months earlier, in pre-production on Batman sequel *The Dark Knight Rises*. He'd been invited to act as stunt double to both the Caped Crusader and Bane in Christopher Nolan's trilogy-closer — an offer that most would have been elated to receive. Adkins, however, had been reluctant. "I felt this wasn't the path I was meant to be on. I wanted to be an action actor, not a stuntman. If being a stuntman was the closest I could have got to making movies, that's what I would have done, but I've always been pretty stubborn, and believed in myself to make the acting work," he says, sitting down for a panini in a coffee shop after our photo shoot.

In the end, Adkins agreed to take on the role of Christian Bale's stunt stand-in as, "This was around the time my first child was born and I'd just had three movies fall through." It wasn't long until disaster struck. Somersaulting onto a mat ›

Top to bottom: Scott Adkins in 2012's *El Gringo*; In the same year's *Universal Soldier: Day Of Reckoning*; And, in a 2012 hat-trick, as Hector in *The Expendables 2*.







Previous spread: Black leather fieldmaster jacket: Belstaff. Cream cashmere zip T-shirt: Brunello Cucinelli. Jeans and trainers: Scott's own. Right: Black leather fieldmaster jacket: Belstaff







one day, he landed awkwardly and tore his anterior cruciate ligament, which is basically the gaffer tape holding your knee together from the inside. To use the correct medical terminology, it's not something you want to fuck up. The injury was especially devastating because Adkins had just decided to quit *The Dark Knight Rises*, after receiving offers for three major roles that he felt might rocket-boost his acting career, just as he was drifting into stunt work.

Adkins ought to have had surgery on the injury. Instead, he pushed through the pain-barrier to film *El Gringo* (alongside Christian Slater), *The Expendables 2* and *Universal Soldier: Day Of Reckoning* — each film full of intense fight choreography and physically demanding leaps and kicks. "I was getting these nice offers through and I thought if I took the surgery, that's six to eight months out while I recover," he confides. The films did get hailed in some quarters: *El Gringo* for its spaghetti-Western action coolness, *The Expendables 2* for its all-star power, and *Universal Soldier* for its machete showdown between Adkins and Van Damme. But these hits came at a cost.

All three productions were excruciatingly painful — especially *The Expendables*. But then, that's usually the case, suggests Adkins, with or without your knee hanging together by a thread. "The reality is, it's always a painful experience from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. There's no glamour. You're blocking people's bones with your bones. Sometimes you get hit. You're bleeding. Your back is killing you," he explains. "If you get injured, they don't shut down and wait for you to get better. They have to continue. I have to grit my teeth and fight through it. And because I'm always under pressure to raise the bar and give the audiences these intense fights, because I want to stay on top, I sometimes cross a line into pushing it too far." He has always found pushing his limits hard to resist.









Top to bottom: With Dolph Lundgren in *Castle Falls* (2021); In Christian Slater's line of fire in *El Gringo*; *Hard Target 2* (2016); Nice moves with Wu Yue in *Ip Man 4: The Finale* (2019).

Action stardom is a dream Adkins has been chasing since childhood. Born in June 1976, he grew up the son of a butcher, a stone's throw from where *Empire* meets him today. From a young age, he and his older brother, Craig, worked in their father's butcher's shop on weekends, earning £10 for 12 hours' work ("I hated it"). The best part of his week was when his dad brought action rentals home from Blockbuster Video. "I remember one day he came home with *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, and me and my brother were so excited," he beams. 1988's Van Damme ninjutsu joyride *Bloodsport* was another formative moment. "I was 12 when that came out, and it blew my mind."

From age ten, he'd been accompanying his dad and brother to judo classes. But there was one problem. "Judo doesn't have any kicks!" Adkins exclaims. His favourite martial-arts movie star, Bruce Lee, was an expert kicker, and it was his moves that Adkins most wanted to emulate. "I started spending all my time in the garden, practising kicking. Then when I was 14 I started taekwondo, and did a bit of ninjutsu in some place above a pub." When one day some local kids mugged him on the top deck of a bus, it sharpened his desire to learn self-defence. "There's a really cheesy martial-arts film called *No Retreat No Surrender*. It's about this teenager that's getting beaten up by bullies and the ghost of Bruce Lee comes to visit him. After the mugging, I literally turned my garage into a scene from *No Retreat No Surrender*. I had a Bruce Lee flag next to all my training stuff. And I worked to make sure that next time someone tries to take my money, they're going to get hurt."

Adkins continued devouring action movies whenever his muscles were too tired to train, developing an encyclopaedic knowledge of the genre — he name-checks obscure kung-fu cinematographers with the enthusiasm most of the world reserves for Beyoncé tunes — and an instinct for what makes a great action scene. "It has to be clear. You need to understand the geography of ›





where the characters are. And having a meaningful story is everything. I've done quite a few films where it's just fight-porn, and you know people are forwarding to the fight scenes. But the best action has compelling fights because you care about the character and the stakes," he says.

After enlisting in drama school and throwing himself into auditions around the country, his high-octane abilities and leading-man looks began grabbing directors' attention, leading to one of the more unusual first two jobs in the history of acting. "My very first job was in Hong Kong as a stuntman, and my second job was in the very first episode of *Doctors* on BBC," he laughs (sadly, his part in the daytime soap didn't involve any flying roundhouses). Things were looking up for the aspiring star. But it was at this point that Adkins made what he calls "my big mistake" — saying yes to almost every offer that came his way.

"I was so overjoyed to just be involved. When I was a kid, I didn't dare dream of becoming a Schwarzenegger — that's not something you're allowed to dream of, being who I am and where I'm from," he says. "I did too many subpar movies. And now they count against me." In 2011, *Matrix* stuntman-turned-*John Wick* director Chad Stahelski told Adkins as much to his face, while trying to enlist the star for his stuntman agency. "I told him I couldn't go down that route, that I didn't want to be a stunt guy. He said, 'Do you know what Hollywood executives think when they see your résumé?' He had a really valid point. Unfortunately I had to put food on the table and provide for my family."

For every movie he's proud of, such as *Accident Man* (the 2018 bare-bones comic book adaptation that he co-wrote and produced) or *Avengement* (his Bronson-esque barrel-blast of a revenge movie), there's been a misfire like 2003's *Special Forces* — "a Navy SEALs movie with martial-arts action that didn't really work out for me," Adkins says. "I had a good role. I remember it coming out and being so excited to find it in Blockbuster Video. When I found it, I wasn't on the cover — it was just a stock image of a faceless Navy SEALs guy. That hurt." The story sums up a feeling he's been battling his entire career. The few times he's been called upon by Hollywood for parts, it's been to play faceless agents, like in *The Bourne Ultimatum*. No character name. No dialogue. Just a forgettable henchman to be quickly dispatched.

"I haven't been given a fair shake because of all the films I've done," says Adkins, "but I am who I am now because of them. Whether you like them or not, they are why I'm capable of what I'm capable of today."







Top to bottom: Punching up with 2016's *Undisputed*; *Avengement* (2019); Fighting Amy Johnston in *Accident Man* (2018); With Kane Kosugi in *Ninja: Shadow Of A Tear* (2013).

Who exactly is Scott Adkins today? He's a man who turned a corner in 2010, with his part in *Undisputed III: Redemption* as Boyka, a prison fighter anti-hero who struck such a chord, he got his own spin-off film in 2017. Adkins' cult following exploded in its wake, as did his reputation, leading to his casting in *The Expendables 2* — a wild experience given his *Rambo*-inspired reverence for Stallone. "Waking up and being at the breakfast buffet next to all these greats was a bit mad, but especially Stallone," he says. A small part in *Doctor Strange* followed, going up against Benedict Cumberbatch's wily wizard as a zealot out for blood. It's a sign of Adkins' ambition that he now regrets taking the part, recently lamenting that he'd "blown my chance" for a bigger role in the MCU; the chance to play a superhero.

He can't say much about his upcoming part in *John Wick: Chapter 4*, but promises he plays "a very unique character who's going to surprise a lot of people". The film reunites him with Chad Stahelski, who owes him a good role, Adkins laughs — after all, it's his fault that Hollywood action has evolved beyond the Stallone and Schwarzenegger-style action specialists that Adkins went into the business trying to emulate.

"With *The Matrix*, Chad trained Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss to look good at doing kung-fu. His company trained Matt Damon and other actors to look like competent fighters. So now you can have Oscar-winning actors and have them look good enough to be an action star. That changed everything."

Does he feel like a man born out of his time? Someone whose career might have panned out differently had he been born a decade or two earlier? "I think it'd have been better, yeah!" he laughs. "It used to be that you had to go to the guy with the muscles for action. I love comic-book movies, but now it's all stuntmen in costumes and CG. It's given the action a cartoony feel. It doesn't have that visceral feel to it, does it?"

The visceral feel that Adkins specialises in has taken its toll. "I can't compete with a 28-year-old version of myself," he says. "I can't do all of the crazy shit I did then." Not that it matters, he adds, "because making a compelling action sequence, it's not necessarily needed." He is changing his approach, he tells *Empire*, to sustain his action abilities into the next decade and beyond. "Watch a Bruce Lee fight. He didn't do crazy shit by today's standards, but it still grips you. I've realised now that there are different ways to create good action."

In other words, to parrot the cheesy movie on which he modelled his parents' garage while moulding himself into an elite fighter — no retreat, no surrender. Adkins may be getting older, but he didn't overcome countless scrapes and emotional setbacks to give up on his action A-list dream now. "I'm hungrier than ever," he says, "and I want people to see that in my movies."

Should you know who Scott Adkins is? You're goddamn right you should.

***DAY SHIFT* IS ON NETFLIX FROM 12 AUGUST. *JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 24 MARCH 2023**

Previous spread: Burgundy cashmere polo neck: Connolly. Jeans and trainers: Scott's own. Left: T-shirt, jeans and trainers: Scott's own. Grooming: Jolanda Coetzer @ LHA Represents. Styling: Amelia Hudson. Additional imagery: Alamy, Allstar, Capital Pictures

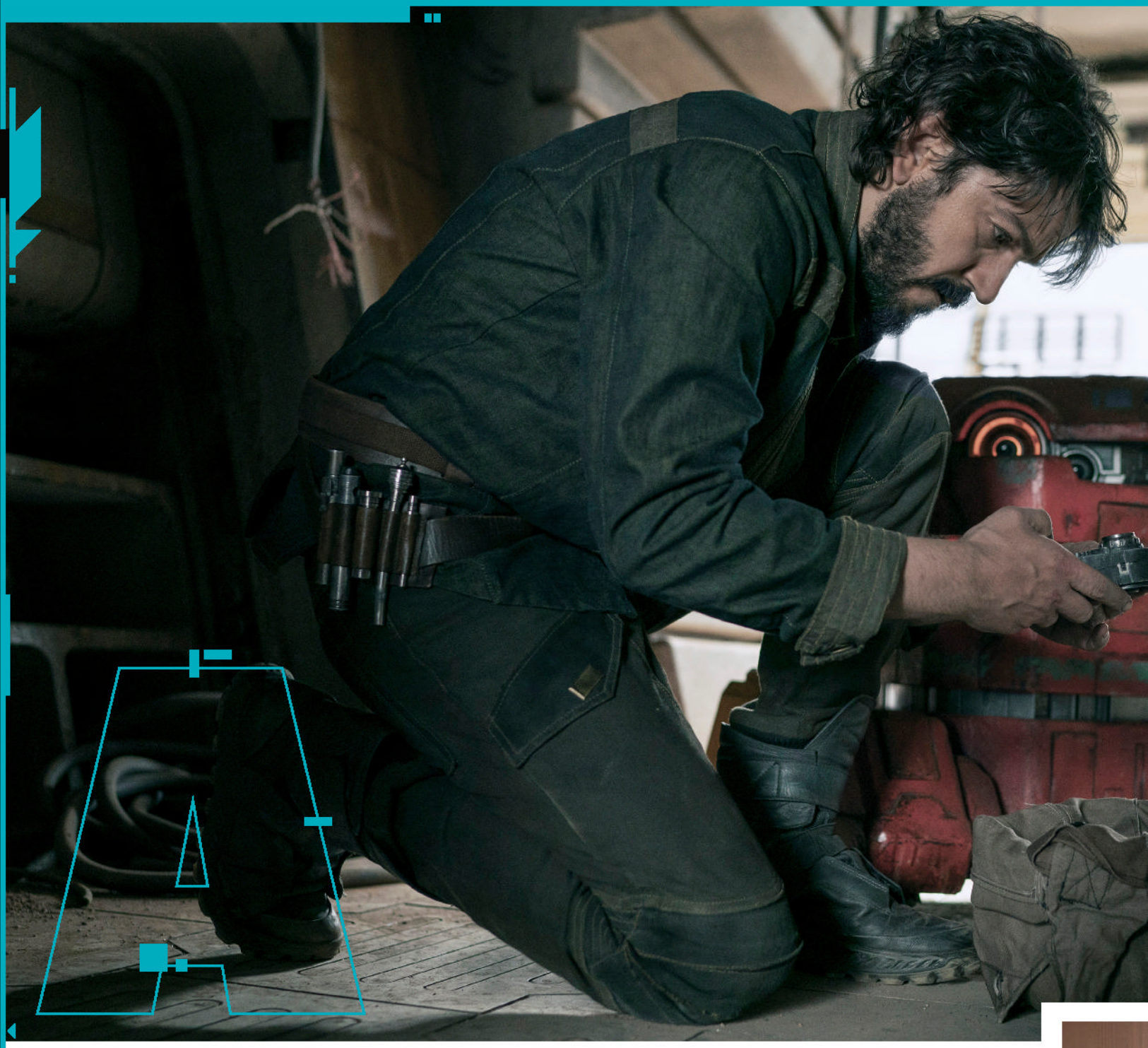


REBEL SPY CASSIAN ANDOR IS BACK FROM THE DEAD FOR HIS OWN "MESSY, COMPLEX" PREQUEL SERIES. THE CAST AND CREW OF **ANDOR** EXPLAIN HOW THEIR SHOW IS PUTTING THE GRIT INTO THE *STAR WARS* GALAXY

GOING

WORDS **TOM ELLEN**


ROGUE



As first impressions go, Cassian Andor's was certainly memorable.

When we meet the rebel spy (played by Mexican actor Diego Luna) ten minutes into 2016's *Rogue One*, he's collecting vital intelligence from a fellow anti-Imperial informant. Within seconds, the pair are surrounded by stormtroopers, and the informant's broken arm means escape will prove doubly difficult. But this is — as the film's subtitle says — *A Star Wars Story*. So, surely, Cassian will do what all *Star Wars* heroes do: conjure a cunning plan to spirit him and his injured teammate to safety.

Not so much.

Without even blinking, our protagonist raises his blaster and coolly executes his companion, before fleeing to transmit the intel. Alone. The casual murder of colleagues is something we might expect from the Empire. But from a member of the Rebel Alliance? What kind of 'good guy' nonchalantly bumps off one of his own?

"The kind who understands that the cause is more important than anything!" declares Luna, passionately. "This is a complex man, who has done nasty stuff for the cause. He has no commitments except to the Rebellion. What needs to happen to someone, what do they have to have witnessed, to be willing to sacrifice everything the way he does?"

Rogue One (which ultimately saw Cassian and friends lay down their lives to pinpoint the Death Star's Achilles' heel) barely scratched the surface of these questions. *Andor*, the latest live-action *Star Wars* series to arrive on Disney+, aims to answer them in precise detail. Predominantly set five years before the events of *Rogue One* (and thus five years before *Episode IV: A New Hope*), the show will track Luna's maverick intelligence officer from childhood to discover why his hatred for the Galactic Empire burns so deep.

Show-run by Tony Gilroy (the screenwriter of the *Bourne* films), and featuring a sprawling ensemble cast that includes Fiona Shaw, Stellan Skarsgård, Adria Arjona, Genevieve O'Reilly and Forest Whitaker (reprising his *Rogue One* role as grizzled extremist Saw Gerrera), *Andor* promises to be even darker and gnarlier than the film that spawned it. Here, its motley crew of rogues tell us why this is the gutsiest *Star Wars* outing yet.

IT'S A SPY THRILLER

Right from its inception, *Rogue One* was billed as a standalone story (killing off 95 per cent of your





Far left: Diego Luna in the title role. **Left:** Luthen Rael (Stellan Skarsgård).

cast will do that). Even so, there were always discussions on set about what Cassian and co might have got up to prior to sacrificing themselves for the greater good.

"Even while we were making *Rogue One*, I remember [Lucasfilm president] Kathy Kennedy saying, 'What else could we do with these characters?'" recalls Gilroy, who was brought onto the movie initially as a script doctor, before becoming a co-writer. "Kathy asked for my take, too, and I had an idea... But it was pretty radical and insane."

"Radical" largely because it was in the exact same key as Gilroy's very un-*Star Wars*-y previous work. From the *Bournes* to brilliantly dark legal thriller *Michael Clayton*, the writer's USP has always been political corruption and corporate shadowplay. As such, he was less interested in lightsabers and Jedi mind tricks, and more concerned with creating a grounded, complex espionage thriller that just happened to be set in a galaxy far, far away. Happily, this was precisely what Kennedy was after. "*Andor* comes from the same place as everything else that's come out of this office," Gilroy tells *Empire* over Zoom from his LA workspace. "*Clayton*, the *Bournes*, *The Devil's Advocate*, now this... It's all full-on drama."

The cast go further. "This is very much a spy thriller," says Genevieve O'Reilly, who returns from *Revenge Of The Sith* and *Rogue One* to play senator-turned-Rebel-leader Mon Mothma. "Each of the *Star Wars* live-action shows has its own identity: ours is gritty and messy. There are so many threads here. Lots of intellectual and political intrigue."

In this show, no-one is quite who they seem. Skarsgård's character — the enigmatic Luthen Rael — comes to Cassian with a job offer, before revealing intimate knowledge about our hero's past. Strap in for secrets, lies, double-dealing and dirty work. "We're in the back room with this show," Gilroy grins. "The people in this saga are the gravel that the road to rebellion is built on."



IT BLURS THE LINE BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARK

In the *Star Wars* universe, 'good' and 'bad' are traditionally clearly defined. When, in *The Force Awakens*, John Boyega's ex-stormtrooper Finn is asked why he's crossing from dark side to light, he simply states, "Because it's the right thing to do."

Part of what made *Rogue One* stand out within the franchise was that the 'right thing to do' was a more nebulous concept. In that film, good people did bad things, and bad people... Well, no, they mainly did bad things, too. But as Cassian Andor's opening scene illustrates, the line between heroes and villains was blurrier than usual for a Lucasfilm joint. *Andor* aims to blur it further.

"Cassian's very first moment [in *Rogue One*] is morally compromised," says Gilroy. "That's what makes him fascinating. He's a killer. He's fluid, he's seductive, he's manipulative. How did he get [like that]? That was the interesting thing with going back five years before the film. How big of a hole can we put this guy in — and what would he have to do to crawl out?"

If this set-up sounds eerily similar to *The Book Of Boba Fett*, it should be pointed out that this particular hole is *metaphorical*, rather than Sarlacc-filled. The series opens on Cassian's adopted planet of Ferrix, where our protagonist is eking out a solitary existence as a lowly street thief — albeit one who bears an uncanny



Above: Syril Karn (Kyle Soller) in pursuit of our hero. **Left:** A commanding Mon Mothma (Genevieve O'Reilly) strides the halls.



resemblance to Paul McCartney circa *Get Back* ("I've been teased with that comparison since I was a kid," laughs Luna. "I'm very happy with it").

His contempt for the Empire is already strong (flashbacks will show the infant Cassian's home world being terrorised by Imperial forces), but he's a long way from the fanatically dedicated rebel leader we meet in *Rogue One*. He's self-interested. Borderline nihilistic. "At this point, he doesn't even know he's *capable* of what he'll do in *Rogue One*," Luna explains. "He says [in that film], 'I've been in this fight since I was six years old.' So, what could happen to a six-year-old child to be involved in something like that? There's an interesting complexity to the character. Tons of contradictions."

As an industrial planet under Palpatine's iron rule, Ferrix offers a closer look at the grubbier, more desperate corners of the galaxy we only glimpsed in *Rogue One*. "You can't say these characters are 'good' or 'bad'," Luna tells *Empire*. "They're just people. Surviving. Everyone has a dark area — and Tony likes exploring that. In this show, even the *droids* have two sides to them."

For Fiona Shaw, playing Cassian's adoptive mother Maarva, the complexity of the themes was part of the attraction. "I was impressed by Tony's social-realist intentions," says the *Killing Eve* star. "He's created a whole new morality. It's very deep and humane — there is grief, mourning, hope, fear. It's not just primary colours here."

IT BRINGS IN REAL-WORLD TOPICS

"Sci-fi has always been an interesting way to talk about real issues," says Gilroy. And indeed, as far back as H.G. Wells, the genre has revelled in holding a mirror up to genuine events. It's a tradition *Star Wars* has embraced in the past, of course — the emergency powers granted to Palpatine in *Attack Of The Clones* echo those Adolf Hitler used to catalyse the horrors of Nazi Germany. In *Andor*, though, the depth of social commentary is arguably the most potent — and current — the franchise has ever explored.

"Tony has written a great, scurrilous [take] on the Trumpian world," Shaw reveals. "Our world is exploding in different places right now, people's rights are disappearing, and *Andor* reflects that. [In the show] the Empire is taking over, and it feels like the same thing is happening in reality, too."

For Luna, the series is primarily "a refugee story". Cassian, he says, "is a character that is forced to move. He's pushed somewhere he doesn't belong, and has to start from scratch." The actor points out that on Ferrix, as in *Rogue One*, Cassian is "in a place where no-one has his accent. How does that define him? Where does he even *come* from?" Spoiler alert: it's not Mexico.

Gilroy agrees that the show's social-realism makes it very different from other *Star Wars* fare: "I didn't come here to do the same old thing. There are refugee aspects to our series; there are political aspects. We have all the food groups."

If Cassian's turbulent youth represents the refugee aspect, the political thrust comes into play via O'Reilly's Mon Mothma, who oversaw that sacrificial heist in *Rogue One* (and was one of the few characters to survive the film). Much like Cassian, Mothma is not yet the hard-headed, anti-Imperial force she will eventually become. "She's still working within the Imperial Senate, trying to gather allies against [Palpatine's] autocracy," says O'Reilly. "She believes in diplomacy. But it's hard to stand up against the Empire. You don't have to look far to recognise that. History is full of this." Despite its alien setting, at its core *Andor* is terribly, recognisably human.

IT GOES OLD-SCHOOL

Back in 2019, when *The Mandalorian* first blasted onto Disney+, there was much online geeking-out over the show's pioneering VFX tech. Developed specifically for the beskar-armoured badass' adventures, ILM's revolutionary StageCraft technology projects high-definition images onto screens around the actors, to give the impression of being on location. The tech has been utilised in every live-action *Star Wars* series since. Until now.

"Yep, we're old-school," chuckles Gilroy. "We didn't use StageCraft at all." Due to what the director calls the "aircraft-carrier-sized" nature of his vision, Lucasfilm felt *Andor* was better suited to being shot in real locations and on vast, intricately detailed sets. "As an actor, it's beautiful," Luna enthuses. "Everything is mechanical. You're interacting with *real* stuff."

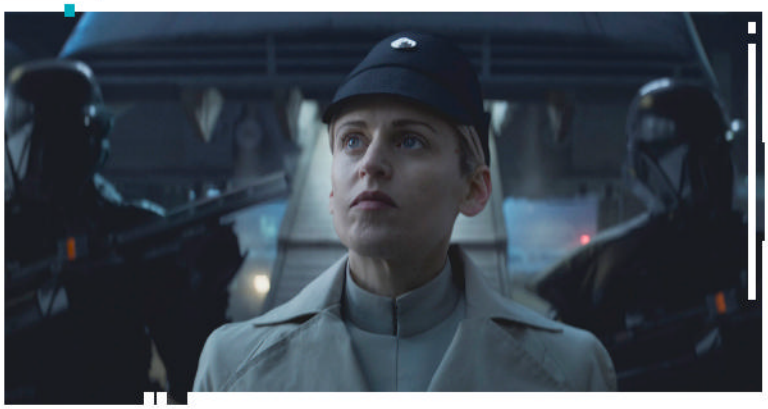
The rest of the cast were equally enthralled. "The design element is phenomenal. *Harry Potter*, eat your heart out!" laughs Shaw, who played Aunt Petunia in that other mega-franchise. "My character's house is built from parts of old spaceships. I used to go out and just











Far left: Maarva (Fiona Shaw) watches her son. **Left:** Dedra Meero (Denise Gough).

stare at it. Breathtaking."

In addition to the sprawling sets at the UK's Pinewood Studios, the show upped its realism further by venturing to some remote — and treacherous — locations. "In Pitlochry, Scotland, we had to walk for *hours* up a mountain to set up one shot," Luna recalls. "Huge effort. Really dangerous to get there. All you can see around you is sky, trees, rivers, lakes. Amazing! Like being on another planet." Which in the show, of course, they will be.

IT DOES AWAY WITH FAN SERVICE

From the first appearance of a ten-year-old Leia Organa, to Ewan McGregor's final, "Hello, there", the most recent *Star Wars* show, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, seemed laser-focused on delighting existing fans, rather than creating any new ones.

Nothing wrong with that, of course: *The Mandalorian* and *The Book Of Boba Fett*, too, are peppered with cameos and Easter eggs designed to appeal to those who can recite Wookieepedia backwards. But perhaps the ace up *Andor*'s sleeve, in terms of audience reach, is that you don't really need to know anything about *Star Wars* to get into it. "Our goal with this show is ambitious but simple," says Gilroy. "We want to blow the hardcore *Star Wars* people away. But we also want their husband, neighbour, sister — that person in their life who's never got why they like *Star Wars*. We're absolutely going for both audiences."

Gilroy was arguably the perfect candidate to set up an entry-point for newbies, given that he had "no interest" in *Star Wars* when he signed on to *Rogue One*. "I think that helped," he says now. "It's effective on a doctoring job to have emotional detachment. You wouldn't want your cardiothoracic surgeon getting emotional." After three years on *Andor*, however, he is now a confirmed fanboy. "My *Star Wars* knowledge is pretty specific," he laughs. "I'm focused on one intense five-year period. But I wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't something that really interested me."

The showrunner's burgeoning passion for this universe trickled down to the cast, too. Denise Gough, who plays sinister Imperial officer Dedra Meero, had little interest in *Star Wars* either when she signed on. She even had to phone close friend — and former Doctor Who — Jodie Whittaker for advice on how to deliver what she charmingly calls "space talk" ("Jodie said, 'Oh, mate, you have to imagine all these pictures in your head...'"). By the time shooting wrapped, though, Gough was won over: "In one shot, I had to walk through loads of extras, flanked by death troopers," she recalls. "[Between takes], I couldn't resist — I started going, 'Dun-dun-dun-dun-dudun-dun-dudun' ['The Imperial March']. And all the extras joined in! I was like, 'Okay, this is *seriously* cool.'"

With its grounded, adult themes and absence of cult characters, *Andor* may well convert plenty more "space talk"-averse viewers when it lands. Which is not to say there will be *no* fan service: after all, Darth Vader and Princess Leia both pitched up in *Rogue One*. Ultimately, it's up to Gilroy.

"The freedom on this show was unprecedented," he admits. "I've never had this level of trust, even with pictures I had final cut on." Such is Lucasfilm's faith, they've already greenlit a second series. Sort of. "It's not Season 2, it's the second half of the story," Gilroy says of the next batch of 12 episodes, which begin shooting in November. "The first 12 are set across one year, and in the next block we cover four years, taking us up to *Rogue One*."

For his part, Luna is confident they've created something special. "What we've made is insanely ambitious, dark and real," he says. "Even as Tony was pitching me, I was like, "This is amazing. You are *sick*.'" Gilroy flashes a mischievous grin at the memory: "I like to flip everything upside down," he shrugs. "People don't hire me to go along easily." On *Andor*, the rebels aren't just in front of the camera — they're behind it, too.

***ANDOR* IS ON DISNEY+ FROM 31 AUGUST**



Above: Showrunner Tony Gilroy and Luna enjoy a light moment on set. **Left:** Cassian means business.



GODS AMONG US

In our regular series, we pay tribute to the towering, mega-watt stars who still roam Hollywood

The absolutely, positively, unequivocal king of cool

SAMUEL L. JACKSON

WORDS **PRISCILLA PAGE** ILLUSTRATION **CHRISTOPHER LEE LYONS**

"HOLD ON TO YOUR butts."

Backlit by electric blue, Jurassic Park's chief engineer Ray Arnold shuts down the system, talking around the cigarette eternally dangling from his mouth. As disaster unfolds, he's not terrified but annoyed, as if he's seen all this shit before. He offers to journey to the other side of the compound to reset the power like he's just making a run down the street to pick up smokes. We don't see him again after that — or at least, not all of him — but Ray Arnold leaves an impression.

Though it's a small part, Samuel L. Jackson transforms it into one that feels lived in, his charisma already at full potency. On paper, "Hold on to your butts," may not have been the screenplay's best line, but Jackson's pitch-perfect, world-weary delivery makes it one of its most quoted. In an interview with *The Times* this year, Jackson put it simply: "I'm the guy who says shit that's on a T-shirt."

Ray Arnold contained within him the nucleus of Samuel L. Jackson's cool. In Gavin Edwards' biography *Bad Motherfucker,* screenwriter Matthew Aldrich explains, "I never feel like he's going to run up against somebody that he doesn't have the guts to confront. But it's the fearlessness that comes from experience, as opposed to bravado, which is the opposite." It was *Pulp Fiction* that officially made Jackson the coolest motherfucker on the planet, but he isn't Jules Winnfield — he's something better, with his own singular brand of charisma. "It was no burden to be cool," Jackson told *The New York Times* in 2012. "I just present myself as I am."

Though Jackson makes everything he does look effortless, the title 'King Of Cool' was hard-earned. He's an enthralling storyteller, a consummate professional, a universally beloved persona. A showman through and through.

With Samuel L. Jackson's distinctive, sonorous voice, he can make anything sound like poetry — his line delivery is downright lyrical. When he utters it, there is no word in the ›



THE BOX OFFICE

Samuel L. Jackson's top five money-makers*

AVENGERS: ENDGAME
$2.8 billion

AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR
$2.05 billion

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE
$1.52 billion

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON
$1.4 billion

INCREDIBLES 2
$1.24 billion

*Global box office, according to BoxOfficeMojo.com

English language more beautiful than "motherfucker". With over 20 years of experience on stage before his star-making turn in *Pulp Fiction*, much of Jackson's potency derives from his background in the theatre. In his movies, he projects like he's still on the stage, commanding the audience, inviting us to join him.

Whenever he's on screen, we pay attention. His magnetism draws us in, but we also know he's going to deliver *the* monologue, whether it's *Pulp Fiction*'s semi-fabricated Bible passage, or his Quint-in-*Jaws* moment just before his demise in *Deep Blue Sea*, or Major Marquis Warren's fatal anecdote in *The Hateful Eight*. And if the lines weren't essential before, they become essential once Jackson speaks them. He convinces us in *Coach Carter* that he's the only guy who could turn a basketball team around with an inspirational speech. *Black Snake Moan* showed us he has the power to save our soul, and we'd implicitly trust him to save us from some motherfucking snakes on a motherfucking plane. Through the years, Samuel L. Jackson exponentially increases the cool quotient of everything he touches. He is a cinematic shot of adrenaline to the heart, who ups the game just by being there.

★ ★ ★ ★

An only child born in Washington D.C., raised by his working-class grandparents in a segregated Chattanooga, Samuel L. Jackson was a precociously intelligent boy, with a stutter that rendered him nearly mute for a year in fourth grade. He loved movies from an early age, spending his Saturdays from morning to night in one of Chattanooga's two Black theatres. Taught to read as a toddler, he might have loved books even more than movies, devouring everything from Shakespeare to comics, his daydreams shaped by *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea* and *The Three Musketeers*. "When I was in the room by myself reading," he told *Playboy* in 2013, "I would stand in front of the mirror pretending to be all those people in the books. I was acting for myself before I ever did it for anybody else." For Jackson, that playfulness in his work remains: acting is still make-believe, and movies are his playground.

With fantasies of becoming the Black Jacques Cousteau, he opted to study marine biology at Morehouse College. When he took elementary public speaking, though, the professor offered students extra credit if they joined a production of *The Threepenny Opera*. The experience was revelatory: Jackson said he discovered his future then, but it was his Aunt Edna, a teacher, who'd planted the seeds. Growing up, she'd put him in school plays and pageants because there were never enough boys. She was the reason he became an actor.

Jackson was a student and a "militant revolutionary dude" (as he described himself to *Playboy*) in Atlanta, a social worker in Los Angeles, and a security guard in New York City. All the while, though, he never stopped acting. His first film credit, *Together For Days*, wasn't exactly a success, but it got him into the Screen Actors Guild. He told *Playboy* he went to Boston "once a year to get killed on *Spenser: For Hire* or *A Man Called Hawk*." Between roles like 'Black Guy' in *Sea Of Love* and 'Hold-Up Man' in *Coming To America*, however, he worried about being











Clockwise from main: With Ruby Dee in *Jungle Fever* (1991); As John 'Ray' Arnold in *Jurassic Park* (1993); Playing FBI agent Greg Meeker in *White Sands* (1992); Hat's entertainment — with Laurence Fishburne in Spike Lee's 1988 musical comedy-drama *School Daze*.

typecast as a tough guy.

In New York, he did off-Broadway plays, and Jackson and his wife — the Tony-Award-nominated LaTanya Richardson Jackson — found a budding, supportive community of Black actors that included Alfre Woodard, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Wesley Snipes and Laurence Fishburne; all of them seemed to find success before he did. While understudying for Freeman, the actor shared some encouraging words: "I don't know why you're working so hard, boy," Jackson recalled to *The New York Times*. "You got it. Just don't quit."

Backstage at one of his plays, Jackson met a film student who informed him he was going to be a director: Spike Lee. *School Daze* was their first film together, but *Jungle Fever*'s Gator Purify became the actor's breakout role. With Gator, he channelled his own struggles with addiction and found catharsis in killing off that old part of his life. It was so powerful it earned him an award for Best Supporting Actor at Cannes, a category brought back just for him — it had only been given out three times before in the history of the festival.

Gator opened the door to Hollywood for Jackson, who began reliably lining up jobs: *White Sands*, *Menace II Society*, *Loaded Weapon 1*, *Patriot Games*. In *Fresh*, he played an alcoholic chess champion who's as gruff as he is sharp; as Big Don in *True Romance*, he waxed poetic about his dietary preferences in the bedroom. Even early on, there were glimmers of the icon he'd become — Jackson proved to be a riveting screen presence no matter how big or how small the role.

And then came Jules.

★ ★ ★ ★

If Gator Purify gave Jackson the recognition he deserved, Jules Winnfield made him a star — or rather, it shined a spotlight on the actor, uncovering the star that had always been there. Yet the road to Jules was not linear. Though Quentin Tarantino told him he'd written the *Pulp Fiction* role for him, it was really for Laurence Fishburne, who turned it down; Jackson was his second choice. Then, Paul Calderón was almost cast — his impressive audition inspired applause. Jackson realised he had to fight for a part that he'd been led to believe was his.

He flew to Los Angeles angry, arriving at his audition with a hamburger, a milkshake, and an I-don't-give-a-fuck attitude. To add insult to injury, the place was empty when he entered — except, as Jackson would later recall, for a producer who called him "Mr Fishburne". Co-executive producer Richard N. Gladstein recounted to *Vanity Fair* in 2013, "In comes Sam with a burger in his hand and a drink in the other hand and stinking like fast food. Me and Quentin and Lawrence [Bender] were sitting on the couch, and he walked in and just started sipping that shake and biting that burger and looking at all of us. I was scared shitless. I thought that this guy was going to shoot a gun right through my head. His eyes were popping out of his head. And he just stole the part." In that room, Jackson *was* Jules Winnfield.

Decades of hard work came to fruition: Jackson was 45 when Jules gave him his big break. *Pulp Fiction* made him a recognisable star, but he went stratospheric after the world's highest-grossing film of 1995: *Die Hard With A Vengeance*. As John McClane's reluctant ally Zeus Carver, he's the audience's proxy, our











Clockwise from main: "Say 'what' again, I dare you!" — *Pulp Fiction* (1994); With Geena Davis in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996); M. Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable* (2000); Working with Tarantino again in *Jackie Brown* (1997); The odd couple — with Bruce Willis in *Die Hard With A Vengeance.* (1995).

entryway into the action — like us, only cooler. Bruce Willis told him *Die Hard With A Vengeance* would change his life, and he was right. The momentum of his career became propulsive, and he has never had a slump since. In just the five years that followed, he originated some of his most compelling roles. Dr Louis Batiste of *Eve's Bayou* is a dashing, well-respected doctor who also happens to be an inveterate philanderer, and Jackson brings to life a complicated, flesh-and-blood man, just as he evokes a yoing daughter's enigmatic, mythic recollection of her father (the story is recalled from her memories). With *Unbreakable*'s Mr Glass, the actor makes a brilliant antagonist eminently likeable despite his monstrous deeds.

Like his Lieutenant Danny Roman in *The Negotiator*, Jackson knows all the right words to say and just how to say them to disarm his audience. But he doesn't even need to speak to make an impact: in 1998's underrated *The Red Violin*, he is Charles Morritz, a violin appraiser who discovers the last instrument made by a 17th-century master. When Morritz hears the violin played for the first time, there's no speech, only a lingering close-up. With his emotions plain on his face, his silence is verbose, expressing something more eloquent than words about the beauty of the music and their effect on him.

During this period, Jackson played two characters in Elmore Leonard adaptations: a brilliant cameo as escape artist Hejira Henry in *Out Of Sight* and the affably evil "ponytail-wearing motherfucker" Ordell Robbie in *Jackie Brown*. Ordell is a small-time arms-dealer who thinks he's big-time, a man by turns cold-blooded, desperate, charming. Their second collaboration cemented Jackson's and Tarantino's creative compatibility: "Sam sings my dialogue," Tarantino remarked in *Jackie Brown*'s DVD extras. "He brings the music out in it in this special way that he owns." But Ordell also illustrates the painstaking care Jackson takes in crafting his characters, writing a biography for each and giving them distinctive looks. For Ordell, Jackson wanted hair like Ron O'Neal in *Superfly*. Tarantino was sceptical, so Jackson paid to have his own wig made; his chin-braid was an homage to the idiosyncratic style of Hong Kong movie villains. Of course, Jackson was right: his look is a perfect visual expression of the character.

Not all of Jackson's films have been instant hits, a natural by-product of such a prolific actor; his career not only survives but seems entirely impervious to underperformers, like 1996's *The Long Kiss Goodnight* which, inexplicably, flopped. Out of all the characters he's ever played, Mitch Henessey is his number one. The ex-cop, ex-con, low-rent detective is fun and funny, one of Shane Black's knights in tarnished armour, a deeply sympathetic fuck-up with a moving redemptive arc. In the film's third act, Mitch makes a surprise comeback after being shot and left for dead. He declares, "That's right. You can't kill me, motherfuckers!" It's triumphant for Mitch, and a watershed moment for Jackson — a meta ›

THE MOMENT

Jules holds court

Pulp Fiction (1994)



"The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides..." The first time Samuel L. Jackson recites Ezekiel 25:17 as Jules in *Pulp Fiction*, his reading is full of menace, instilling fear in his quarry. Though it's an iconic scene, it's Jackson's *second* delivery that clinched his nascent stardom. Jules confesses, "I just thought it was a cold-blooded thing to say to a motherfucker before I popped a cap in his ass." But, having witnessed a miracle, he finds new meaning in the semi-invented *Bible* verse, and it's reflected in the way Jackson speaks it: like a prayer, a directive for grace. What was initially terrifying becomes calming enough to defuse a robbery.

Quentin Tarantino told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1994: "He's doing this almost *Richard III* storm-sequence kind of thing — except he's in a coffee shop, bent over, sitting in a booth. He's dominating the entire room while never getting up from that booth. Sam's just really remarkable." Through the power of his own charm, Jackson makes a hitman lovable, transforming Jules into the main attraction, as magnetic as the film's established stars. Though it's Harvey Keitel's The Wolf who's described as "totally cool, in control", those words define Jackson — not just in these moments, but for the rest of his career.











response to all those bit-parts Jackson played at the start of his career where he was nameless, or killed, or both. He told *The New York Times*: "Before Jules, my characters were just 'The Negro' who died on page 30." But Jackson turned the tide. He was meant to die in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, but it tested so poorly that he was revived. Director Renny Harlin recalled that someone in the audience actually shouted, "You can't kill Sam Jackson!" It undeniably signalled his newfound popularity, his *irreplaceability* — his enduring cool.

He even became a Jedi Master. When Jackson first saw *Star Wars* in 1977, he wondered how actors got to be in a movie like that. Twenty years later, he found out, when George Lucas made him Mace Windu. Though *The Phantom Menace* introduces his character, he doesn't cut loose until *Attack Of The Clones*, fighting alongside Obi-Wan Kenobi and lopping the head off Jango Fett. In *Revenge Of The Sith* Mace Windu duelled with Palpatine himself, with only a month to learn 97 moves, in a sequence that took three days to shoot. Jackson told CBS this year that, though he admired Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier as a child, "I wanted to be Errol Flynn if I was gonna be somebody. I wanted to be up there sword-fighting and swashbuckling across the screen!" It was a dream achieved playing the swashbuckling Jedi who, at Jackson's request, wields a purple lightsaber — which, as a surprise for the actor, was later engraved by the prop department with the letters "BMF" for "Bad Motherfucker".

★ ★ ★ ★

In 2008's *Iron Man*, Jackson made his first appearance as the character that continues to rule his career: Nick Fury, director of S.H.I.E.L.D. In the comics, Fury had been white — until writer Mark Millar and artist Bryan Hitch used Jackson's likeness in their *Ultimates* series because, as Millar told *Business Insider* in 2015, "Sam is famously the coolest man alive." Jackson got a nine-picture deal out of it, and deservedly so: he's maybe the only guy believably powerful enough to be put in charge of the world's mightiest heroes. No other actor could have hyped us more for the Avengers Initiative, making him the perfect herald of a new era and a "bigger universe".

Fury plays to Jackson's strengths: he's a complicated dude who's fundamentally good, but tends to operate in a moral grey area, the living embodiment of the notion of "the end justifies the means". Like Tony Stark says, he's not just a spy, he's *the* spy — "His secrets have secrets." He's incisive, brave, equally charismatic and intimidating. A survivor with a knack for resurrection. Like Jackson, he's larger than life, and the actor clearly relishes the role. He's made Fury his own, often writing his lines, even adding elements from his life to the character's backstory — the story he tells Steve Rogers in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* about his granddad was inspired by Jackson's own grandfather, who was also an elevator operator for years.

Though Jackson could coast on his Marvel success, that isn't his style. Since becoming Fury, he has reunited with Spike Lee for *Chi-Raq* and an *Oldboy* remake and created a fresh franchise with *The Hitman's Bodyguard*. He revived an old iconic villain *and* originated a new one: Elijah Price in *Glass* and *Django Unchained*'s Stephen. He has played a mess of villains, but avoided the typecasting he once feared: they're always nuanced, and never the same.

Mr Glass and Stephen offer a compelling case study in Jackson's genius. There's more to the masterminds than meets the eye: Elijah's restraint and Stephen's gregariousness and obsequiousness belie their true nature. In

Alamy, Allstar, Capital Pictures, Photofest, Shutterstock







Far left: Gunning for glory — *Avengers Assemble* (2012). **This page, top to bottom:** Purple reign: as Mace Windu in 2005's *Star Wars: Revenge Of The Sith*; In *Django Unchained* (2012) with Leonardo DiCaprio; Bounty-hunting in *The Hateful Eight* (2015). Alongside Ryan Reynolds in 2017's *The Hitman's Bodyguard.*



2012, Jackson told *Entertainment Weekly* that Stephen was "the power behind the throne", the true king of Candieland, as Leonardo DiCaprio's plantation owner Calvin Candie isn't "the brightest candle in the room". Likewise, Mr Glass is always a step ahead of everyone else. Stephen is a Judas and his villainy derives from a desire to preserve power; but for Elijah, his journey is a coming-of-age story — by finding his superhuman counterpart, he proves he wasn't a mistake and finds his place in the world. With these two characters, Jackson gives two layered, vastly different performances: he plays Elijah at a softer volume, tapping into his pathos, while he plays up Stephen's flamboyant malevolence with pleasure. He turns one into the most sympathetic supervillain of all time and the other into a deeply despicable adversary.

After *Django Unchained*, Jackson and Tarantino collaborated again with *The Hateful Eight*, this time with Jackson as the film's protagonist, bounty hunter Major Marquis Warren. It's evident how Tarantino tailor-made the character for the actor: Marquis is stylish, ruthless and captivating as hell. In Tarantino's riff on Agatha Christie, Marquis is our Poirot, an incisive detective who solves the mystery of Minnie's Haberdashery. A spellbinding storyteller, he plays the other characters like a fiddle; whether he's charming them or infuriating them, our anti-hero never loses his audience — them or us. *The Hateful Eight* made it plain to see that in their legendary partnership, Jackson is the Clint Eastwood to Tarantino's Leone.

As Marquis, Jackson got to fulfill another childhood dream: starring in a Western. He's spent a lifetime making the kind of movies he loved when he was a boy, the kind he pretended to be in. It's still what drives him, and the joy he shares in doing so is infectious. He explained to *60 Minutes* in 2019 that, "When you come on stage, you want to light it up to the point that, when you leave, people want to go with you. And I hope that's who I am when I show up." It's exactly who Jackson is: an actor so skilful, so magnetic, we'd gladly follow him on any adventure — and there are big ones coming soon, including Matthew Vaughn's spy thriller *Argylle*, plus the return of Nick Fury in the series *Secret Invasion* and in Nia DaCosta's *The Marvels*.

This year, Jackson finally received an honorary Oscar. "I got out there to entertain audiences the way Hollywood entertained me," he explained in his acceptance speech. "Make them forget their lives for a few hours and be thrilled, awed, or excited in the big room where make-believe lives." But the long-overdue award only confirmed what we already knew: that Jackson's an indomitable screen presence who turned Hollywood into his own stage. At 73 years old, he continues to create, to tell new stories, to bring new characters to life. He's still putting butts in the seats. He remains a bad motherfucker. The James Brown of the movies. The indisputable King of Cool.

MIA

The Jackson roles that never were



RESERVOIR DOGS

Jackson auditioned for Detective Holdaway, for Quentin Tarantino and producer Lawrence Bender. "I knew that the audition was not very good", Jackson later admitted.



THE MATRIX

It's fun to imagine what Jackson could have done with Morpheus, but there's a nice symmetry: Laurence Fishburne had been set to play Zeus in *Die Hard With A Vengeance*, but Jackson got the part.



TRAINING DAY

Training Day almost saw Jackson starring as cop Alonzo Harris, with Matt Damon as naive rookie Jake Hoyt. The pair were recast when Warner Bros. picked up David Ayer's script.



THE REVENANT

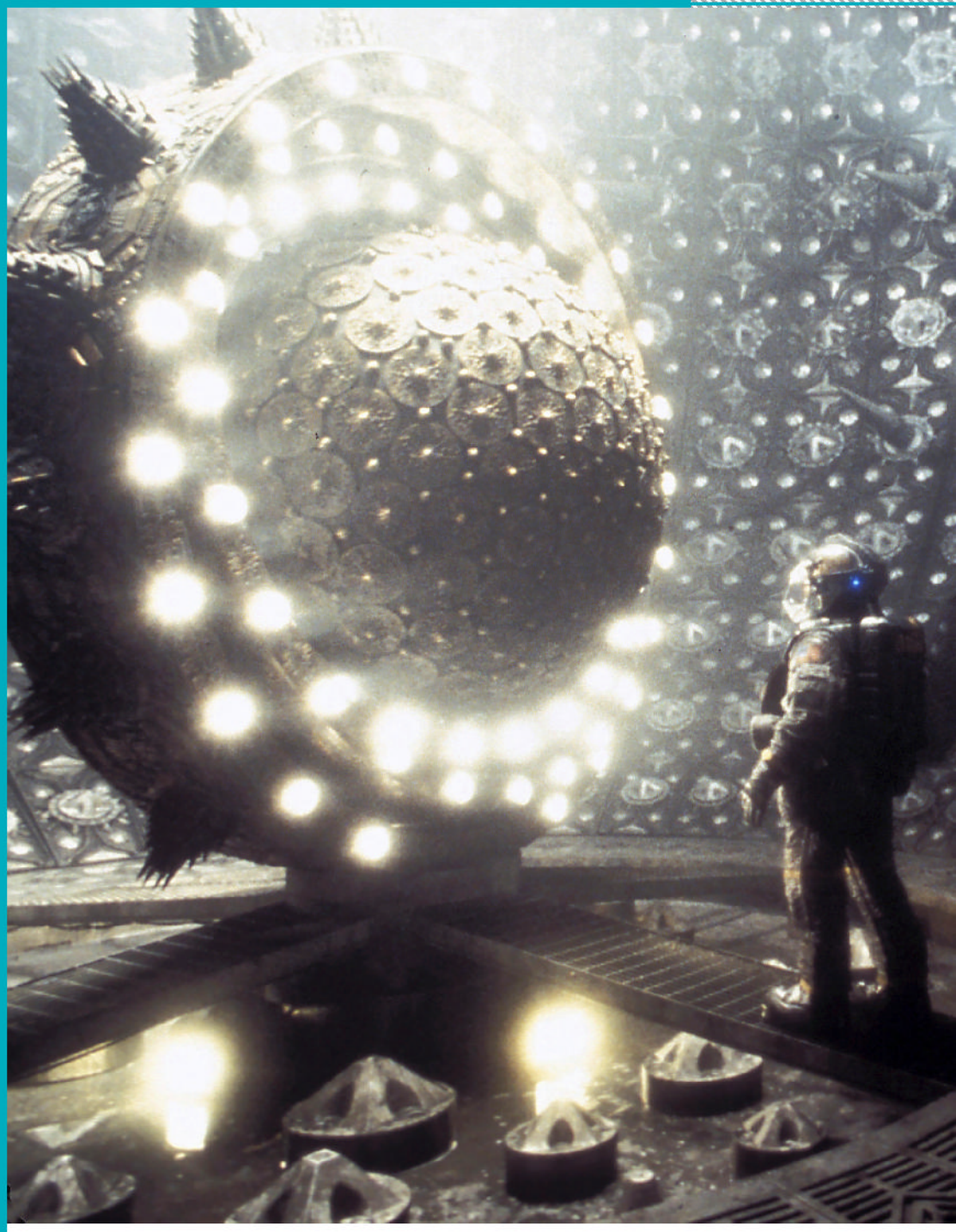
According to screenwriter Mark L. Smith, filmmaker Park Chan-wook was attached to his first draft, with Jackson playing Hugh Glass. He even wrote a draft specifically for the actor. This version fell through because the studio wouldn't give Park final cut.

VIEW

SPOILER WARNING

INDISPENSABLE HOME ENTERTAINMENT

[EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT]



EVENT HORIZON HAS a whopping 29 per cent on Rotten Tomatoes. Why, then, is a four-page interview about an unalloyed stinker leading this section, some 25 years after its release? Well, less of the "unalloyed" for a start. *Event Horizon* won't be the first movie that critics were wrong about, and it won't be the last. (For the record, this magazine gave it three stars back in 1997; by comparison to most reviews of it, that's a rave.) Paul W.S. Anderson's (he was just Paul Anderson back then) sci-fi horror, about a spaceship crew who venture onto the mysteriously abandoned eponymous spacecraft and come face-to-face with a malevolent force that may or may not be straight from Hell itself, was battered upon its release, but from the off won over a small army of devotees, hooked and haunted by its no-nonsense blend of grisly gore, genuinely startling jump scares, an expertly conjured sense of dread and, in Sam Neill's creepy-cum-camp turn as possessed scientist Dr William Weir, a cult anti-hero for the ages. It's Anderson's best film, and over the past quarter of a century that small group of devotees has grown and grown, counting among its number the likes of Adam Wingard (who is attached to a TV series based on the movie) and Taika Waititi, who namechecks the movie in *Thor: Love & Thunder*. With his film finally getting its due, Anderson chatted on Zoom with *Empire*'s Chris Hewitt — an *Event Horizon* superfan from day one — on the eve of its 4K re-release.

Paul, it's 25 years since *Event Horizon* came out. You can't leave. She won't let you.
[*Laughs*] I know, it's horrifying. Not just the movie, but the whole concept of 25th anniversaries. I had the 25th anniversary of *Mortal Kombat* a couple of years ago. That was bad enough. There'll be bloody *Resident Evil* up



Event movie

Paul W.S. Anderson's EVENT HORIZON is 25 years old, and finally recognised as a modern horror classic. The director talks to *Empire* about why it took so long



Left: Justin (Jack Noseworthy) approaches the third seal in the Event Horizon's second containment. **Below:** Director Paul W.S. Anderson on set in 1997.

next. It's just all deeply unpleasant. Actually, my daughter [Ever] has become an actress, and she just did a movie with Jude Law, which was taking a trip down memory lane, because Jude was in my first movie, *Shopping*. That was weird, because 27 or 28 years after we'd worked together suddenly we're thrown together on set — he was playing Captain Hook in *Peter Pan & Wendy*, and she was playing Wendy, and I was playing the part of the proud father, being basically an on-set chaperone. And I had these photographs of the *Shopping* wrap party, and it was just hysterical. We both looked so young. It was just really terrifying.

Has Ever seen *Event Horizon*?
Ever hasn't even seen the last *Resident Evil* movie, the one she was in! So no, she's definitely not seen *Event Horizon*, nor is she likely to in the foreseeable future.

Why has the film endured, in your opinion, after that faltering start?
I think it was a bold movie for an expensive studio movie, or relatively expensive. I think Philip Eisner [the film's screenwriter] had some bold ideas and I made them even bolder, or worse, or more terrifying, however you want to put it. I think we benefitted from having a studio that was very preoccupied with *Titanic*. They had a very hands-off approach to us. All the studio executives were flying to Mexico to be shouted at by James Cameron and then having to go into therapy afterwards, and no-one came to visit us in London. We were just getting on with it and doing what I wanted without anyone questioning it. If I wanted to bring in Joely Richardson on the weekend to tie her up in barbed wire and douse her in blood, they were all for it. We did a lot of the horror stuff as second unit, but the second unit was me directing it and it had principal actors in it, so it was basically the main unit working a sixth day. And a lot of studio people don't bother to look at second-unit footage. So I think when they finally saw the finished film, Paramount were in a state of shock. I don't really think they had seen where the movie was going. It was potent stuff and probably handicapped us, because the studio were a bit scared of the movie and didn't know how to promote it. But the fact we made it as strong as we did means that it aged well over time.

I'm surprised that they were surprised. Does that mean the religious imagery — not just the blood and gore — that runs all the way through the film was something you brought to it? They hadn't just missed it in the script?
Philip's script was always a haunted-house movie in space. That was his concept. The Gothic imagery is something I definitely brought to it. I'm a big fan of *Alien* and *2001*, and I thought, "If I'm going to go into space, I want to do something different. On the one hand, there's Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke; on the other it's H.R. Giger and Ridley Scott. How can I survive in that kind of environment?" And I was in Paris, walking around the Notre Dame Cathedral, as you do when you're in Paris, and I was just so impressed by the Gothic ›

architecture. We came up with the idea of basically building Notre Dame Cathedral inside a computer and then tearing it apart, and using the component elements to build the Event Horizon. Which meant that everything had an overt Gothic feel, like the flared pillars you see throughout the movie. A less overt example is if you look at the thruster pods of the Event Horizon, they look suspiciously like the towers of the Notre Dame, but turned on their side.

Was that something you were drawn to because of the implications of Hell in the story?

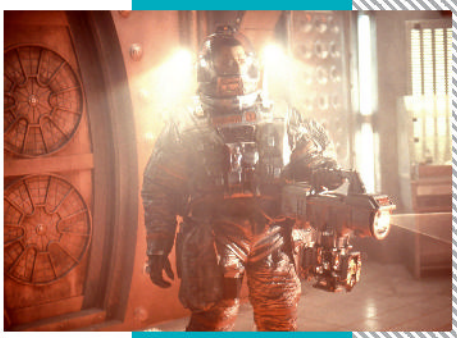
In the earlier drafts of the script I had read, what was wrong with the Event Horizon was kind of an alien infestation, but like *At The Mountains Of Madness*. It was tentacular. And while that was a very interesting concept, I was more drawn, maybe because of my English upbringing and being forced to go to church as a child and feeling like all the times I was sitting in a pew as a kid, bored out of my mind, has to be good for something, I brought the idea that what if that dimension was what we would perceive as Hell, and maybe people had slipped through into it before? And that's where our idea of what Hell is from. I think by using that we made the movie more powerful than it would have been if we'd stayed with the original tentacular, otherworldly, alien feel. I think that resonates. But there was an element that certainly hurt us in North America, and with the studio, because they never liked it: the ambiguity of the ending. We never really say, is it Hell? American audiences don't like the fact that you leave the cinema, and you don't know what happened. I always felt that was a strength. In England, everyone was going down the pub afterwards, talking about the ending — what did it mean? Where do you think the Event Horizon really went?

Twenty-five years on, what's your definitive answer?

[*Pause*] I think I never knew. I never liked to be specific. I never definitively said it's Hell. [Laurence] Fishburne took a lot of persuading to say that word. He said, "I think it's a bad idea. I don't want to say 'Hell'." Philip's script was great, but for that kind of darkness and the religious aspect we had Andrew Kevin Walker come in. He made it a lot more specific, and then working with Fish we went back and made it less specific, because he didn't feel like it was the right thing to let the audience know. And he didn't want to say it. I said, "I think you have to say it just once." And he did, and it's a very powerful moment in the movie. I think it would have been greatly reduced in its power if we had just been flinging, "Oh, it's a gateway to Hell" out there.

Below, top to bottom: Unusual leisure facilties aboard the Event Horizon; Laurence Fishburne as Captain Miller; The crew discuss their next move; Time to call the fire brigade.











Your bad guy, ultimately, turns out to be Dr William Weir, the creator of the Event Horizon, played so memorably by Sam Neill. I've interviewed Sam about this movie and he good-naturedly grumbles about being naked for most of it.

[*Laughs*] He wasn't naked for most of it. Those are just the bits he remembers. I guess they were the most memorable bits. Those were the freezing-cold bits. We were shooting in winter at Pinewood Studios on the old Bond stage, that was just like a big, metal shed with a concrete floor. And he was basically naked with a bunch of prosthetics on. He would always get right up against the space heaters because he was freezing and he couldn't put blankets on because he was covered in blood and it would get all sticky. He was a real trouper. Oh my God, what we put him through.

How much did he know about what you were going to subject him to when he signed on?



Alamy, Allstar





Clockwise from left: Space travel, 1997 style; Sam Neill as Dr William Weir; Tests for the human Catherine Wheel were going well.



I think it was always there on the page. But I don't think he was fully aware of the extent of what I'd be asking him to do. I think most of the actors weren't aware. He had the most discomfort, definitely, but they all went through it. I remember Joely coming to me and saying, "I have a sense of dread every time I walk on these sets. There's something really unpleasant about walking onto the set here." And it wasn't the crew, and the cast were amazing. Maybe I was deeply unpleasant, I don't know. But it was more a vibe that the place had. You really felt like you were entering into the haunted house. So much of it was real. In the control room behind Joely and Kathleen Quinlan, when it's all dark and then we illuminate the wall behind them and it's covered with exploded body parts, we put it all up there for real, and it looked really distressing and horrible. If you went up there and poked it, it was slimy and nasty. I often refer to the film as a ride film. It was recreating these funhouse rides where you would go in as a kid, and they could really have people in the dark, touching you and being horrible to you and you would smell their breath. Back then, funhouses were scarier, and it was that kind of vibe I was trying to evoke. I think we did, and that came across in the performances because we gave them the environment that really helped enhance it.

How do you feel now when you look back on *Event Horizon*?

When we were prepping for *Soldier*, which was the movie I made with Kurt Russell right after *Event Horizon*, *Event Horizon* had come out and had kind of underperformed. It didn't do the business that we all felt it deserved, considering the effort we put in and how good we thought the movie was. I was a bit down about it. And I screened it for Kurt because we were about to work together, and after the movie he said, "This is the movie you're going to be glad you made in 20 years' time. Forget about whatever it does now." And he's a smart guy, Kurt, and he was totally right. It's the movie from my back catalogue that people talk about the most, and I'm immensely proud of it. He knew what he was talking about. **CHRIS HEWITT**

***EVENT HORIZON* IS OUT ON 8 AUGUST ON 4K BLU-RAY**



Poetry in motion (pictures)

In a revealing interview, the great director TERENCE DAVIES tells us why *Benediction* is his most personal film

IN A CAREER lasting 46 years and ten films, Terence Davies has made hypnotic, deeply personal meditations featuring people who don't feel at ease in the world or with themselves. "I've always been on the outside looking in," he begins. "When you are a child, you are not aware of it, you just do it. I just listened all the time. But what it does, of course, is it isolates you. You grew up an observer and, to that extent, I have never lived a life fulfilled."

While he is still preoccupied with guilt, shame and introspection. there has been a change in the MO by which the 76-year-old Liverpudlian filmmaker has picked at his psychic scars. The first three films — *The Terence Davies Trilogy*, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* and *The Long Day Closes* — were ripped from the fabric of his own life, his tough upbringing (an abusive father, bullying at school, struggles with his sexuality and Catholicism) parlayed in non-linear stories through gorgeous, mesmerising imagery and naked, heartbreaking emotionality, But more recently, Davies has found a different kind of film to bare his soul — the poetry biopic. 2016's Emily Dickinson study *A Quiet Passion* and now *Benediction*, about World War I poet Siegfried Sassoon (Jack Lowden), are thinly veiled self-portraits, filtering his own feelings through the prism of similarly tortured artists.

"I think he is literally looking for some kind of redemption," says Davies about Sassoon. "That only came to me really after I'd finished the film. In a way it's autobiographical because I've always been looking for redemption and I've never found it. You can't find it in other people. You can't find it in art. You can't find it in religion. You can't find it anywhere. You have to find it in yourself, and I don't think he found it. And I certainly have never found it."

One way Sassoon perhaps sought redemption keys into a major formative influence of Davies' own life. In old age (the more senior version of him is played in the film by Peter Capaldi), Sassoon converted to Catholicism. A devout child, Davies was raised Catholic but renounced his faith aged 22, realising it was "all lies told by men in frocks. Why would you want to become a Catholic, for God's sake? It's a pernicious religion. I don't know why people are drawn to it."

Sassoon was comfortable with his sexuality as a gay man, the polar opposite of Davies. "I only stayed on the gay scene for about two months and thought, 'This is not for me,'" he says. "The level of cruelty and sexual venality — I just couldn't bear it. That constant interchanging of partners fascinates me because I never understood how it was done." Now celibate, Davies still mounts a bedroom scene between Sassoon and Jeremy Irvine's Ivor Novello ("No-one ever gets cramp, no-one ever farts," he moans about movie sex in general). Despite serious themes, *Benediction* emerges as Davies' funniest film, full of the arch one-liners ("How was Bavaria?" "*Bavarian*") you sometimes find in his interviews but rarely in his work.

"Gay men are very funny," he says. "Sometimes





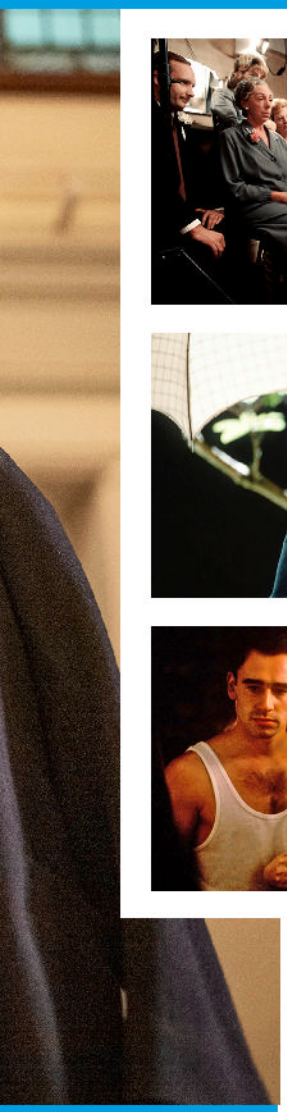
Top to bottom: Jack Lowden (Siegfried Sassoon) and Jeremy Irvine (Ivor Novello) in *Benediction*; Terence Davies, Kate Phillips and Lowden; Peter Capaldi as the older Sassoon.







Left, top to bottom: Davies directing *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988); Gillian Anderson in *The House Of Mirth* (2000); 1992's *The Long Day Closes*.







they can be very cruel, but you can't deny their wit. They always remind me of women who live up north and have a wonderful sense of humour. Also, there's nothing worse than being solemn. I did want to make sure that it had amusing moments to throw into relief the darker things."

In-between the autobiographical films and the poetry pictures, Davies has made a number of female-centric literary adaptations— *The Neon Bible*, *The House Of Mirth*, *The Deep Blue Sea* and *Sunset Song* — fuelled by the cinema-going memories of his youth. They add to a body of work its creator feels is unappreciated. It's yet another quality he shares with both Dickinson and especially Sassoon. The latter's poetry was overshadowed by that of war poets Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke, both of whom were killed in action — granting them, Davies believes, a cachet never afforded Sassoon.

"I think it was part of the validation Sassoon was looking for," says Davies, about receiving recognition. "If he had got it, would it have made any difference? I don't know. Like anyone in the arts, of course you want to be rewarded. The tragedy now is that awards are ten-a-penny and it does seem to make them all very meretricious."

He hopes his next film (funding willing) will be *The Post Office Girl*, an adaptation of Stefan Zweig's novel about the eponymous protagonist living in a small, poverty-stricken town near Vienna just after World War I. "I'm no good in the modern world," Davies says. "I can't see contemporaneity as interesting. I wish I could. If I were asked to make 'The Fast And Furious 29', it would come out as 'The Slow And Slightly Irritable'." An *Avatar* sequel might be more his speed. For no-one makes more exquisitely beautiful films about blue people than Terence Davies. **IAN FREER**

***BENEDICTION* IS OUT ON 8 AUGUST ON DVD**

Alamy

MARK KERMODE'S MOVIE PLAYLIST

THE CRITIC AND SCALA RADIO PRESENTER CHOOSES SCORES HE'S BEEN PLAYING ON HIS WEEKLY SHOW



1. MEN

All men really are the same in Alex Garland's haunting folk-fairy-tale that mutates into full on body-horror fleshiness. Ben Salisbury and Geoff Barrow's brilliantly unsettling score really gets under the skin of this mind-boggling drama, mixing choral voices and unearthly groans to utterly disorientating effect. For a taste of just how disturbing the music is, check out the deceptively inviting opening track 'Pastorale', the skin-crawling 'The Green Man', and the cavernously creepy 'The Church'. And if you fancy some more folk-horror-inflected music suggestions, soundtrack albums for *The Wicker Man* (by Paul Giovanni and Magnet) and *Midsommar* (by The Haxan Cloak, aka Bobby Krlic) both feature eerie tunes that lend a sinister edge to the summer holidays. Enjoy!

2. ANTARTICA

Following the death of Greek composer Vangelis, we received several requests from Scala listeners for favourite tracks from films like *Blade Runner*, *Missing* and *Chariots Of Fire*. But the most rewarding request was for music from *Antarctica*, the 1983 Japanese movie for which Vangelis earned a Best Score nomination at the Japanese Academy awards. The film, which told the true story of dogs left to fend for themselves during an ill-fated scientific expedition in the '50s, became a then record-breaking hit domestically and remains a popular favourite in Japan. A loose Disney remake, *Eight Below*, was released in 2006 and earned an ASCAP Film and Television Music award for composer Mark Isham.

3. YOU ARE NOT MY MOTHER

Regular Scala listeners will know I'm a big fan of composer and filmmaker Die Hexen. Last year, she provided the atmospheric accompaniment to Kate Dolan's *You Are Not My Mother*, which was nominated for several Irish Film And Television Awards including Best Score, in which category she went up against the likes of David Holmes for *Kin*, Van Morrison for *Belfast*, and Stephen Rennicks, who won for *The Quiet Girl*. You can watch *You Are Not My Mother* on Netflix, and the score is now available digitally.

4. HUSTLE

Dan Deacon's score for the documentary *Ascension* was genuinely remarkable, and his music for this well-received Adam Sandler Netflix sports dramedy, recorded with the London Contemporary Orchestra, is no less adventurous. Dive into opening track 'Combine', and then just keep listening...

scala RADIO

MARK KERMODE'S FILM MUSIC SHOW, IN ASSOCIATION WITH *EMPIRE*, IS ON SCALA RADIO ON SATURDAYS FROM 1-3PM (SCALARADIO.CO.UK)



Emotional intelligence: Joy (Amy Poehler), Anger (Lewis Black), Fear (Bill Hader), Disgust (Mindy Kaling) and Sadness (Phyllis Smith).

THE MASTERPIECE

We reassess the greatest films of all time, one film at a time

Inside Out

CHRISTOPHER NOLAN ONCE announced a film "set within the architecture of the mind"; Pete Docter could have described his extraordinary *Inside Out* in similar terms, and delivers more literally on the promise. A story focused on the competing emotions inside an 11-year-old girl's head as she faces the greatest challenge of her young life, this is a metaphor extended to feature length and somehow, magically, able to sustain itself.

It came, as so many of the best films do, from a personal conundrum. Docter started wondering what was going on inside his young daughter's head as she approached adolescence and her personality shifted in ways he didn't quite understand. Being an animation genius, what could have been an idle musing became the engine for a years-long storytelling odyssey. How do you conceptualise the workings of a human mind on the brink of adulthood? How can you possibly encapsulate one human being's inner life, for even a couple of days? It turns out that, with trial and error and vast effort, the Pixar team found a way.

So we are introduced to the five emotions inside the head of young Riley (Kaitlyn Dias). There's Amy Poehler's Joy, manically trying to keep Riley happy at all times; Phyllis Smith's Sadness, apparently intent on bringing everyone down; Bill Hader's hysterical Fear; Mindy Kaling's contemptuous Disgust; and Lewis Black's explosive Anger. Riley is moving, with her family, across the US to San Francisco, leaving her friends and spacious suburban life behind. When Joy, trying to hold Sadness back at this change, loses the 'core' memories that make Riley who she is, Joy and Sadness must go on an odyssey through Riley's mind to return to their place in her 'headquarters' with the lost treasures — and bring Riley back to herself.

It's a parade of huge concepts that the film must explain in relatively short order. But Docter's most dizzying achievement is that he actually made two films that play out at exactly the same time, on the same screen. Kids get to watch a typical Pixar buddy comedy, with a colourful pair on a madcap adventure through a magical landscape. It's a comedy that may give them some new concepts to help explain their own feelings among all the squashy, stretchy characters and wild, Powell-and-Pressburger-meets-Dalí landscapes, but it's recognisable as family entertainment. There is running and jumping and flying; squabbling characters and a unicorn with a rainbow mane. It's charming, and exciting.

Adults, meanwhile, are watching a scientifically informed discussion of how our consciousness works and seeing a mind grow from childhood to adolescence, facing

Alamy, Getty Images





Above: The elephant in the room — Bing Bong (Richard Kind) with Joy and Sadness. **Left:** The Emotions' view of Riley's life.

disorienting emotional shifts and grappling with serious mental danger along the way. There's real meat to the interplay of the characters, and a rigour in the illustration of these abstract ideas; Docter, co-director Ronnie del Carmen and the team worked with psychologists and neuroscientists to create something that was not just fun but also useful as we try to understand ourselves.

For example, at one point with both Joy and Sadness gone and Riley's other Emotions squabbling uselessly, Riley's 'control panel' shuts down entirely. *This*, it's clear to adult watchers, is depression setting in: not feeling sad, but the inability to feel anything at all. It's only when Sadness helps Riley channel her frustration and upset that it's possible for her to function again. That's an extraordinary concept to explain visually in a movie aimed at kids.

No wonder it took years, and a huge amount of trial and error, to get there. Docter and his team had to work out which Emotions should dominate and how Joy and her team might look (Disgust was, apparently, the hardest to figure out). A team of imaginary friends were boiled down to one, lingering infant dream: Richard Kind's pure and lovely Bing Bong. They toyed with different ways of showing the Emotions' effect on Riley: at one point, Joy manifested in the real world; at another, early concept art also showed a harp that cried tears when Riley was sad. They eventually settled on a *Star Trek*-style control panel, all lights and joysticks (pun almost certainly intended). The Mind-scape went from a sort of magical mountain to a bright white space, surrounded by pink clouds and possibility stretching into infinity: a contrast to the desaturated colours and rough edges of the 'real' world where Riley is struggling.

As you'd expect, many familiar Pixar preoccupations shine through. Joy and Sadness have the studio's classic odd couple-in-the-workplace dynamic, with the unstoppable force of Joy's manic determination meeting Sadness' immovable weariness. Both voice actors channel characters they perfected on TV: Poehler's endlessly upbeat Leslie Knope from *Parks And Recreation* and Smith's low-impact saleswoman from *The Office*.

Like the art-history credits of *WALL·E* and the Married Life montage of *Up*, there is a show-offy animated sequence for Pixar afficionados. Joy, Sadness and Bing Bong take a shortcut through "conceptual thought", and become abstract shapes and finally single lines before escaping back into the 'reality' of the rest of the mind. The most unfailing Pixar trademark is there too: the outrageous tear-jerking. Here, Bing Bong sacrifices himself for Riley's happiness, a last act of selfless love from a creature who only ever existed to make a child happy. But noting that filmmakers are once again doing what they do well is no criticism, and the sophistication of this film puts it apart from most of the studio's output; only *Soul* (co-directed by Docter) in recent years has come close to this level of ambition.

Ultimately, Joy learns that no-one can be truly happy all of the time; sometimes you need to feel down because that is the right response to a tough world. When she hands over the reins willingly to Sadness, Riley's world opens up. Her capacity for emotion and connection increase, and her Emotions reconfigure with her. It's a grown-up sort of conclusion to, literally and figuratively, one of the brainiest movies ever made; a case where sharing is not just caring but the only way to truly transform your world — and if that weren't enough, it has a funny bit with a cat. **HELEN O'HARA**

***INSIDE OUT* IS ON DISNEY+ AND ON DIGITAL**

PETE DOCTER IN NUMBERS



9/10/68
PETER HANS DOCTER IS BORN IN BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA

1990 JOINS PIXAR AFTER GRADUATING FROM CALARTS, SOMETHING OF A BREEDING GROUND FOR THE COMPANY

2018
Becomes Chief Creative Officer of Pixar

9 NUMBER OF FILMS HE'S DIRECTED AT PIXAR

4 NUMBER OF SHORT FILMS HE'S DIRECTED (*WINTER, PALM SPRINGS, NEXT DOOR, MIKE'S NEW CAR*)

5 The number of founding members of the Pixar Braintrust, of which he is one (the others are John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton, Joe Ranft and Lee Unkrich)

$857 MILLION
The worldwide total of his highest-grossing film, *Inside Out*

9 NUMBER OF OSCAR NOMINATIONS RECEIVED

$2.29 BILLION The total made by his films at the global box office

3 NUMBER OF OSCARS WON (BEST ANIMATED FEATURE FOR *UP*, *INSIDE OUT* AND *SOUL*)







! SPOILER WARNING

THE VIEWING GUIDE

A deep dive into the must-see moments from the month's big release



The Northman

WHEN HE FIRST spoke to *Empire* about the film in 2021, director and co-writer Robert Eggers promised us that *The Northman* would be "a true epic" — and he certainly delivered. Inspired by the old Icelandic sagas, it is a muddy, bloody, brutal tale of revenge that frequently bludgeons all hell out of you. Here, Eggers unpacks his ferocious beast of a movie.

A PSYCHEDELIC COMING-OF-AGE

A few minutes into *The Northman*, the magnificently titled King Aurvandil War-Raven (Ethan Hawke) gifts his young son Amleth (Oscar Novak) a ritualistic journey into manhood, courtesy of royal jester Heimir (Willem Dafoe)… and the psychedelic plant henbane, which soon has them on all fours, barking like dogs, burping and farting. "That was a ritual that [Icelandic co-writer] Sjón invented, that we then retroactively infused with more research," says Eggers. As for the various bodily squelches… it seemed rude not to. "Bruegel and Cervantes and Shakespeare, who Sjón and I can never reach to do anything but kiss the hem of their robes, they're not afraid to use scatological humour, so why shouldn't we?"

THE ULTIMATE VIKING RAID

When we meet the adult Amleth (Alexander Skarsgård), he has lost his way, forgetting the oath he made to avenge his father, who has been beheaded by Aurvandil's treacherous, queen-stealing brother Fjölnir (Claes Bang). Now a merciless berserker, we witness Amleth and his cohorts rip their way through a village, in a bravado bit of filmmaking. "That was something we wanted to do from the very beginning," says Eggers. "We spent the most time in prep on that sequence, because it's the most complex. And, while very difficult, it was also one of the most satisfying. It became very close to how I imagined it."

CONTACT SPORT

Undercover as a slave, having infiltrated his unsuspecting uncle's community, Amleth is forced into a deadly game of Knattleikr. This involves a bunch of burly men, a terrifyingly hard ball, and heads being caved in. "Knattleikr is all over the place in sagas, and is something that was really important to Sjón, that I really didn't want to do," says Eggers. "I'm not interested in sports, and I was concerned that I wasn't going to have the passion to shoot it. Sjón convinced me of its importance. And then I had to convince Jarin [Blaschke], my cinematographer, to care about it because he hated sports too. I said, 'Look, dude, I know you and I got picked on and beat up by jocks, but we've got to grow up and figure this out.'" The result is painful — to see it is to shudder.

TRUE LOVE

As he begins his mission, Amleth meets Olga (Anya Taylor-Joy), a white witch who claims she has the power to break men's minds. She melts Amleth's heart. Again, this — a love story —











was Sjón's idea, and again, Eggers came round to his way of thinking. "I'm just allergic to cheese," Eggers explains of his reluctance to get romantic. "Though there's plenty of cheese in this movie, in some readings of it. When you're doing something big and earnest, you're always walking the line, you're always dancing with and around cheese. So you try to limit your intake so you don't get constipated."

AMLETH'S REVENGE

Finally, with his sword at the ready, Amleth brings the carnage — and not without flourish. His oppressors get dispatched extravagantly, particularly when he affixes some newly separated body-parts to the front of a hut. "I don't really like super-gory things," says Eggers. "I made this movie, so maybe I'm blind to the level of gore that I have gone in for." Yet he will admit to having enjoyed writing and directing these moments. "Does that make me sound like a villain? I don't know. But sure, it's fun. The first killing has often been described as an art installation. So there you go."

O MOTHER, WHERE ART THOU?

As the bodycount rises, Amleth prepares to free his kidnapped mother, Queen Gudrún (Nicole Kidman), who claims that her murdered husband was a rapist, that she always hated him, loves Fjölnir, and seems to detest Amleth. Yet even that doesn't sway him too much: he's still hellbent on offing his uncle. "Well, he has to," says Eggers. "That's a Viking code of honour. So he says, 'My mother is as evil as Fjölnir. I will become a hailstorm of fire and steel and burn their world to the ground.'" And so he does, his killing spree ramping up. Let the intestines spill.

A VOLCANIC CLIMAX

The Northman concludes with Amleth and Fjölnir having a naked swordfight on an erupting volcano; a visit to Iceland a few years ago inspired Eggers, and the end came first. "Those landscapes made me think, 'A naked swordfight on a volcano needs to be the end of a Viking movie if I make one, because there is nothing more elemental than that.' One of the first things I said to Sjón when we met was, 'Is this a stupid American Hollywood ending?' And he said, 'No, it's clearly coming from someplace that's not just commercialism. I think this could be cool. Let's figure it out.'" There was little room for subtlety.

AN UNHAPPY ENDING?

Both men die at the end, the bloodthirsty Amleth leaving Olga to raise their as-yet unborn children on her own. Yet, having completed his mission, thus, he believes, protecting his kids from Fjölnir, he seems happy. Eggers doesn't want to give away his take on this bloody mess. "I wouldn't want to say, because I'd like the audience to be able to take with it what works for them," he says. "As a filmmaker trying to tell Amleth's story, I had to be able to understand how it's a happy ending for him. But that doesn't mean I see it as a happy ending." Okay, but hey — it hardly warms the cockles. "Well... now I guess I am saying it but... it is hard not to see it as a waste," he concedes. Indeed. Stupid men. Stupid naked men. **ALEX GODFREY**

THE NORTHMAN **IS OUT NOW ON DVD AND BLU-RAY**

Alamy



THE RANKING

Four *Empire* writers. Ten movies. Ordered definitively.

The films of Sam Raimi

Chris: Sam Raimi is my favourite director of all time. He may or may not have made my favourite film of all time. Where do you stand on Raimi? When did you first get into his films?

Dan: For me it was *Army Of Darkness*. I quickly got to *Evil Dead II* from that. But I just loved *Army Of Darkness* because it was funny, and had fantasy stuff in it.

Helen: I have almost precisely the same story. I had heard of the *Evil Deads* but hadn't watched them. I got into *Army Of Darkness* because I had a friend at uni who adored that as much as he hated the others.

Ben: For me, it was *Spider-Man*. Then later in life, I had a really good experience with the Raimi horror stuff — I saw loads of it for the first time on the big screen. I have a small handful of 'Greatest Ever' cinema experiences, one of which is the *Force Awakens* press screening. Another one is *Evil Dead II*, three in the morning, Tyneside Cinema.

Chris: Like Ben, I had a life-changing experience watching *Evil Dead II* for the first time. It was like the scales fell from my eyes. The central appeal of Raimi for me is that he's one of the most exciting and inventive and innovative visual stylists in the history of cinema. He's forever coming up with crazy shots; you can just imagine him cackling away to himself as he does so.

Ben: The cackling glee of it is a thing I love about Raimi. By the end of *Evil Dead II*, everything's gone nuts and a tree has come to life and there's a portal to the past. I think it's just the most outrageously entertaining movie ever made.

Dan: But when you go back to *The Evil Dead*, that's an important and actually brilliantly made film. Yet once you've seen *Evil Dead II*, it's just not quite as good. It's got flashes of the virtuoso camerawork, but I always feel a little bit sorry for *The Evil Dead* because of that.

Ben: It's like the scuzzy demo tape.

Helen: I appreciate the *Evil Dead* films, but I don't have that visceral love for them. Whereas *Drag Me To Hell* really got to me. It's such a simple, stripped-back kind of story, and then it escalates and escalates and escalates. It's as dark as anything in *Evil Dead*.

Chris: It continues this grand tradition of leaving his

OUR CRITICS



CHRIS HEWITT
The sole person who thinks Bruce Campbell should have played Spider-Man.



DAN JOLIN
Loves scary Raimi, but is unmoved by his scariest: *For Love Of The Game*.



HELEN O'HARA
Eagerly awaiting the release of 'The Quick And The Evil Dead'.



BEN TRAVIS
Such a huge *Evil Dead* fan he's planning a festival, the Necronomi-Con.



Illustration: Jacey

protagonists in one hell of a pickle. Alison Lohman in *Drag Me To Hell* may be the most pickletastic.

Helen: She is literally dragged to hell. Call me an old fuddy-duddy, but I think that's a worse pickle than any of the others.

Chris: He has a general propensity for torturing his protagonists. It's not a good thing to be a protagonist in a Sam Raimi movie.

Helen: Like Bill Paxton in *A Simple Plan*. He makes one terrible choice after another and gets further and further from every goal he's ever set in life as he does so.

Ben: That struck me as another Sam Raimi film in which people find a bunch of cursed paper in the woods and their lives spectacularly fall apart.

Dan: I think it's a beautiful, beautiful film. It's genuinely tragic, it's not winking at you at all. His other attempts to calm down and be a grown-up, I don't think worked out that well. I would once have said, "I'll tell you one thing about Sam Raimi, he's never boring." And then I saw *For Love Of The Game*.

Chris: I'll tell you where he isn't boring: *The Quick And The Dead*.

Dan: Why the hell was that film a flop? I just don't understand.

Helen: I think it was one of those moments where people maybe weren't excited about Westerns. But it's fantastic. I love the character work, I love that the film is just a series of heartbreaks. It creates genuine tension.

Chris: Because of the genius of the series-of-duels concept, he cannot allow himself to repeat the same trick twice. Every duel is different, stylistically and visually. There's one where it's entirely reverse dollies.

Ben: The contradiction of Raimi is that he's pushing the boundaries and doing wild, wild stuff, but he's also a real traditionalist. The tension between those two things is what allows him to make things like the Spider-Man movies.

Chris: He's made five comic-book movies. Four of those are based on actual comic books. The other is *Darkman*, which is this weird paean to Universal horror movies and pulpy B-movie heroes like The Shadow. It might be one of the purest Raimi films.

Helen: It has all the flourishes, but it also has sincerity and heart. It feels both ahead of and behind its time.

Chris: I think you just described Sam Raimi. He's a man out of time.

Ben: *Darkman* is a really vital piece of the puzzle. It's the perfect midpoint between *Evil Dead* and *Spider-Man*.

Helen: *Spider-Man* gave the superhero genre life. It succeeded to a degree nobody really understood was coming.

Ben: There are many reasons that he's perfect for this. The kinetic quality of Raimi's filmmaking, and also his sentimentality. This is a story about a geeky guy who lives next door to a hot girl and can't tell her how he feels. It's told through the lens of that love story.

Helen: And with *Spider-Man 2*, to see Raimi unleashed, where he keeps everything that worked about the first film but amps everything up, was just absolutely joyful.

Chris: It still saddens me that *Spider-Man 3* went as wrong as it did. I don't think it's a terrible film but there's a pretty precipitous drop in quality.

Helen: I'm going to blame Venom. The studio was obsessed with putting Venom in there, and Raimi was more engaged with continuing the Harry Osborn story and bringing in Sandman. It just knocked everything out of kilter.

Chris: There were nine years between *Oz The Great And Powerful* in 2013 and *Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness*. A superhero film, a horror film, a Marvel movie. He wrote the book on this in many ways.

Ben: I think it's great. I feel like he made a better Sam Raimi movie than an MCU movie. I think it's more Raimi than *Spider-Man* or *Spider-Man 3*, in a ghoulish sense.

Dan: To me, it's even more Raimi than *Spider-Man 2*.

Chris: It's almost like a Raimi tribute act. Like he's going through the motions a bit. "Oh, this is what the Raimi fans want."

Dan: I just love the fact that there's a moment in *Spider-Man 2* where they're discussing what to call Doctor Octopus and one of the suggestions is 'Doctor Strange'. And all these years later he's actually made a Doctor Strange movie. And it's his best film with a witch in.

Chris: Oh, Dan. I'm going to quibble with your contention. *Evil Dead II* is the best movie that Sam Raimi has made with a witch in it. In fact, *Evil Dead II* is the greatest movie of all time, made by anybody in any universe, or indeed multiverse.

Helen: Well, that's a completely unbiased opinion.

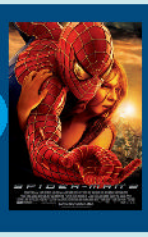
Chris: Enough squabbling. Let's vote!

THE TOP TEN

=1 

EVIL DEAD II (1987)

Chris: "A worthy (joint) winner. The movie that changed my life is at once a hoot of a horror and a cult comedy classic, with some of the most bravura sequences of Raimi's career."

=1 

SPIDER-MAN 2 (2004)

Helen: "Raising the stakes and casting off his inhibitions, Raimi gives a how-to for superhero sequels. The Doc Ock operation scene alone almost earns this placement."

3 

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD (1995)

Dan: "Raimi does spaghetti Western in a virtuoso gun-duel-fest that never stops being fun to watch."

4 

DRAG ME TO HELL (2009)

Ben: "Gumming geriatrics! Possessed goats! Murderous hankies! Hilarious and horrifying, with a killer ending."

5 

A SIMPLE PLAN (1998)

Chris: "Raimi proves he can do sober and 'grown-up' in a truly gut-wrenching crime story."

6 

SPIDER-MAN (2002)

Chris: "Okay, it's maybe dated a bit, but the first big-screen Spidey is still a swinging good time."

7 

DARKMAN (1990)

Chris: "Pulp and horror meshed gloriously, matched by Liam Neeson leaving no scenery unchewed."

8 

ARMY OF DARKNESS (1992)

Ben: "Too busy being a wacko comedy to rustle up many scares. But who cares when it's this much fun?"

9 

THE EVIL DEAD (1981)

Ben: "Scuzzy, bleak, and perhaps eclipsed by its sequel — but properly scary, with gnarly gore to boot."

10 

DOCTOR STRANGE IN THE MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS (2022)

Helen: "Raimi brings twisted humour and Deadite stylings to the MCU."

AGREE? DISAGREE? WRITE IN AND TELL US AT:
LETTERS@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM / @EMPIREMAGAZINE

search 'Be More Geek' on:

Trustpilot
4.9 Excellent

BE MORE GEEK .CO.UK

WE BUY POPS!

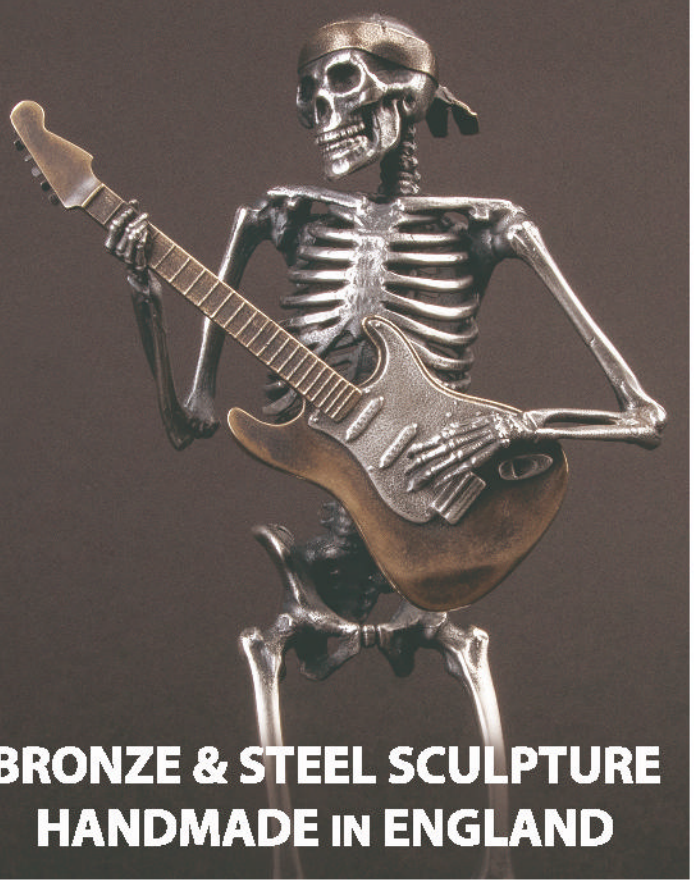
FAST PAYMENT

FREE COLLECTION UK WIDE

SCAN TO GET STARTED!



WWW.RAVENARMOURY.COM



BRONZE & STEEL SCULPTURE
HANDMADE IN ENGLAND

Dig deeper with
MOJO THE COLLECTORS' SERIES
delivered to your door!







Music's legends.
MOJO's finest writers.
The full stories.

Each edition of our deluxe bookazines takes a deep and exhilarating dive into the world of one of our favourite artists, like The Beatles, David Bowie, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, and many more. The Collectors' Series enables readers to dig down even further, putting the magazine's cherished icons firmly under the microscope.

Why subscribe?

- *Save money off shop prices*
- *Never miss another issue*
- *Find more extraordinary stories, more detailed information and many more rare and iconic images*
- *Receive 10 beautifully crafted special editions a year*
- *Guaranteed best deal when you buy with us!*
- *FREE UK delivery*

VISIT: www.greatmagazines.co.uk/MOJOCollectors

Or call 01858 438884 and quote BIAA

Terms & Conditions: Subscriptions will start with the next available issue and are priced from £90. The minimum term is 12 months. Recurring payments will continue to be taken unless you tell us otherwise. This offer closes on 31/12/2022. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Cost from landlines for 01 numbers per minute are (approximate) 2p to 10p. Cost from mobiles per minute (approximate) 10p to 40p. Costs vary depending on the geographical location in the UK. You may get free calls to some numbers as part of your call package – please check with your phone provider. Order lines open 8am-9.30pm (Mon-Fri), 8am-4pm (Sat). UK orders only. Overseas? Phone +44 1858 438828. Calls may be monitored or recorded for training purposes. For full terms and conditions please visit: http://www.greatmagazines.co.uk/offer-terms-and-conditions

THE CULT OF KIM NEWMAN

The critic and novelist selects the month's weirdest home-ent releases



CAN YOU WATCH too many films about dolts who lark about the ocean like complete prawns, get into trouble out of sight of land, and are chomped to bits? In James Nunn's Shark Bait, pretty youths (UK soap actors pretending to be dudebros and Kansas gals) annoy a great white after crashing 'borrowed' jetskis. Nunn (*One Shot*, *Tower Block*) stages one terrific non-shark-related stunt, but the script seems to be random pages of *47 Meters Down*, *The Shallows* and *Open Water* stapled together. Whining personal subplots fill the clinging-to-the-wreckage patches between big-fish attacks.

Taneli Mustonen's The Twin is another mix-and-match, scrambling *The Other* (or, for those with shorter memories, *Goodnight Mommy*), *Rosemary's Baby* and *Midsommar*. After the death of a child, Rachel (Teresa Palmer) and Anthony (Steven Cree) flee the US for his ancestral home in Finland — along with Elliot (Tristan Ruggeri), their surviving kid. Elliot insists on having a bed in his room for his dead twin Nathan, and then that he *is* Nathan, who was the evil one of the twin-set. A neighbour (Barbara Marten, best thing here) warns Rachel that pagan locals are using her in an arcane ritual to resurrect the Devil. The last act does compound predictable twists with fresh material, Ruggeri has good creepy-kid vibes and the Finnish locations are as eerie as in Mustonen's solid slasher *Lake Bodom*.

Benjamin Louis' Stoker Hills is either an intricate, ambitious exercise in storytelling or a bit of a jumble that's hard to get into. Student filmmakers (David Gridley, Vince Hill-Bedford) attempt a night-time guerilla shoot on a zombie sex-worker movie ('Streetwalkers') and try to rescue their star (Steffani Brass) from a monk-hooded, pig-hearted (not a misprint), blood-siphoning maniac (Jason Sweat). When they lose the camera (and go missing themselves), the cops (Eric Etebari in a hat, William Lee Scott with a rosary) examine the found footage for clues. After a *Saw*-style finish in an underground torture-porn lair comes another turn — featuring guest star Tony Todd — you'll either find clever or annoying.

Uniquely among imitations of *Wait Until Dark*, Randall Okita's See For Me casts a legally blind performer (Skyler Davenport) as lead character Sophie. Former Olympic skiing hopeful Sophie cat-sits in isolated luxury homes and steals small items on the grounds no-one would prosecute a blind semi-celebrity. When more serious criminals invade the house she's looking after, she needs sighted remote assistance from phoneline volunteer Kelly (Jessica Parker Kennedy). The home is kitted out with pricey obstacles to trip over or use as weapons (not really compatible with having a curious cat), and Davenport's interestingly unsympathetic lead works up a rapport with Kennedy's Kelly.

Made under the cleverer title 'CURS>R', Toby Meakin's Choose Or Die is another warning against playing games designed by Satan. Kayla (Iola Evans) fires up a vintage text-based computer game (voiced by Robert Englund, playing himself) which forces her to make tough choices that resonate gruesomely in the real world. The film's act comes together in a 'boss level' which pits Kayla against the previous highest-scorer (Eddie Marsan). It has barbed footnotes about '80s nostalgia and impressive one-off challenges — the cleverest keeps the horror (Kayla's mom versus a giant rat) off screen while rendering the scene in retro green-screen graphics.

CULT HERO OF THE MONTH

PHIL TIPPETT

Animation cognoscenti recognise Phil Tippett for Ray Harryhausen-style stop-motion snippets in *Star Wars* (the chess pieces) and *RoboCop* (the killbot on the stairs), and he's got credits on franchises from *Indiana Jones* to *Jurassic Park* to *Twilight*. For 30 years, Tippett has been handcrafting his aptly titled meisterwork *Mad God* (now on Shudder). Imagine *Eraserhead* on the scale of *Dune* or an Aardman-Švankmajer version of *Hard To Be A God*. A World War I-look assassin in a gas mask descends to a war-ravaged planet and treks through mutant-infested ruins to plant a bomb, but his mission goes awry and the universe winds up restarting. Alex Cox pops in as the 'Last Man', but most of the cast are small, twitching, unique animated creations — though leftovers from pop culture are strewn among the intricately wrought wreckage. It is without doubt one of the maddest, godliest things you've ever seen.

Illustration: Neil Edwards. Getty Images

Gutter credit

The Linda Hamilton Chronicles

There's no fate but what we make for ourselves. The star talks us through the key roles with which she's built hers

VICKY BAXTER

CHILDREN OF THE CORN (1984)

One of Hamilton's earliest starring roles was in a schlocky adaptation of the Stephen King short story

"I thought that was going to end my career. Because every cool thing that's in the book disappeared the day before we were shooting it. I'd go, 'Isn't the corn supposed to be black here?' And they'd go, 'Yeah, we couldn't afford that.' Then they added a scene where I'm getting back in this damn car at the end, and I was like, 'Why am I doing this? People will think I'm stupid.' And the producer looks at me and goes, 'We *want* the audience to think you're stupid.' My heart did sink, but one learns that you can only do your part."

SARAH CONNOR

THE TERMINATOR (1984)

Hamilton's first shot at the role of her life, a waitress-turned-warrior, in James Cameron's sci-fi thriller

"I did not understand what it was going to be until I saw the film, and then I said, 'Oh my God, that man's a genius.' We were doing wild things — they had me learning on a 1250 [motorcycle], a machine I couldn't even pick up, before they scrapped that, I imagine for my own safety. And our special-effects coordinator just loved setting things on fire. Some crazy days. I don't remember a whole lot about Arnold from the first movie, largely because we are never sharing a space, except for the disco and then at the end. I was a little bit of a theatre snob — I trained in New York — and was like, 'Uh, Arnold?' But then I went to set and watched him do his best cyborg, and thought, 'Yes. This could work.'"

CATHERINE CHANDLER

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (1987-'89)

Hamilton starred opposite Ron Perlman in a spin on the classic tale

"It was a wonderful couple of years, because I got to work with Ron and say beautiful dialogue. But I also am the kind of person who will ruffle a bit if things get too repetitive. So I did chafe and got real tired of going, 'Vincent, I feel it in you.' I remember when we did our collision kiss, when we grab each other, there was so much hoopla at the network. They were just afraid. So I cried when I saw that scene. By the way, Ron still calls me Beauty. And he'll always be Beast. I will always love him dearly."

SARAH CONNOR

TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY (1991)

Back, and bulked up, as an embittered Sarah Connor for Cameron's mega-sequel

"It was a significant time in my life, because my first husband left while I was pregnant. And it was just a wonderful bit of timing, in terms of, 'You're not going to be in a puddle here. You need to be a *soldier*.' I got maybe four hours of sleep a night for that entire shoot, because I had a baby who couldn't be ignored and a huge job. They were really good days, but the biggest meltdown I ever had in my career was on that show. I was just incredibly disciplined about eating; I ate nothing with fat. And I had asked for red Jell-O for my treat at lunch. When it didn't arrive, I just broke. I was like, 'I asked for ONE THING!' There was red Jell-O on my next two or three films, I'm pretty sure."

RACHEL WANDO

DANTE'S PEAK (1997)

Dodging lava and falling in love-a with Pierce Brosnan in this fun '90s caper

"It was very interesting to do a film that was so huge, but with dialogue that was just kind of ordinary. But Pierce and I had a really good time. We were just trouble together. I did almost drown on that film, in the lake. They needed this big shot, against the biggest greenscreen in the world at that time, on the back lot of Universal. The boat had to go on a very specific axis, so they pulled it on a guide wire. And somehow, the wire pulled the bow under the water. Pierce was heroically trying to keep the propellor away from us, and I had a child in my hands and Elizabeth [Hoffman], who played my mother-in-law, on my back. My feet were touching the bottom of the lake but



Clockwise from left: Dolupiet omnis molescia duntiis dit aut ut vit derrum nate mi, od quisitatiate et ut la cumque endel enducipsae nullate volupta volo mo exped et maio.

Illustration: Mike Cathro

Gutter Credit



Gutter credit

Clockwise from far left: *Beauty And The Beast*; *The Terminator*; *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*; *Terminator: Dark Fate*; *Children Of The Corn*; *Dante's Peak*; *Resident Alien*.

I couldn't move. In terms of life-threatening things at work, that was the big one for me."

SARAH CONNOR

TERMINATOR: DARK FATE (2019)

After sitting out *Terminators* 3 to 5, Hamilton came back older, wiser but no less lethal

"It just felt so emotionally loaded, going back. I'd worked my ass off beforehand, going to the most painful, disappointing places, combing through bitterness and darkness. And then, when we started and there wasn't a finished script, it all of a sudden became clear that it might not be a good movie. I had an existential crisis on that film. Tim [Miller] would say, 'I want her relatable.' And I would go back to my room and say, 'Relatable? When was Sarah Connor ever relatable?' I love Tim. I love my ladies. But to me there was just something missing. It moved a little too fast. And there were so many beautiful moments that didn't make it in. I'll need to see it again, ten years from now, when I've stepped way, way back."

GENERAL McCALLISTER

RESIDENT ALIEN (FROM 2021)

A return to series TV as a military officer hunting down Alan Tudyk's loveable and literal illegal alien

"After *T2* I was offered police officers, lesbians, military people and crazy people. It does seem to be my destiny to play authority figures — I played the President once, and this is my second general. But I'm having a great time playing the character; there's a vulnerable child under there. And it's so much fun to get in and win my comedic chops. It's something I haven't gotten to do a lot of. I really just love it more and more, the more they let me do." **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

***RESIDENT ALIEN* SEASON 2 IS OUT NOW ON SKY AND NOW**

THE STORY OF THE SHOT

How iconic images came to life

White Heat

ACCORDING TO Warner Bros.' publicity spiel of the time, there are 260 scenes in Raoul Walsh's 1949 *White Heat*. But there is only one moment that has lodged itself in the pop-culture Hall Of Fame. At the film's climax, psychotic hoodlum Arthur 'Cody' Jarrett (James Cagney) is crouched atop a gas-storage tank, surrounded by the police. Wounded by a blaze of bullets, Jarrett staggers around the platform, giggling and shrieking. The oil refinery starts to explode around him, but rather than cower, Jarrett stands up and shouts, "Made it, Ma! Top of the world!" A howl into the void, the line was later voted as the 18th-greatest movie quote by the American Film Institute.

"Made it, Ma! Top of the world!" — it's often misquoted as, "Top of the world, Ma!" — can be found in Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts' original screenplay, with the scene description suggesting in brackets that the line reading be delivered "hoarsely". Inspired by New York murderer Francis Crowley, who was killed in a shoot-out with the police — his final words were, "Send my love to my mother" — and real-life bank-robber Kate Barker, aka Ma Barker, and her sons, Jarrett's obsession with his mother came from Roberts, who felt the Oedipus complex gave the story the feel of Greek tragedy.

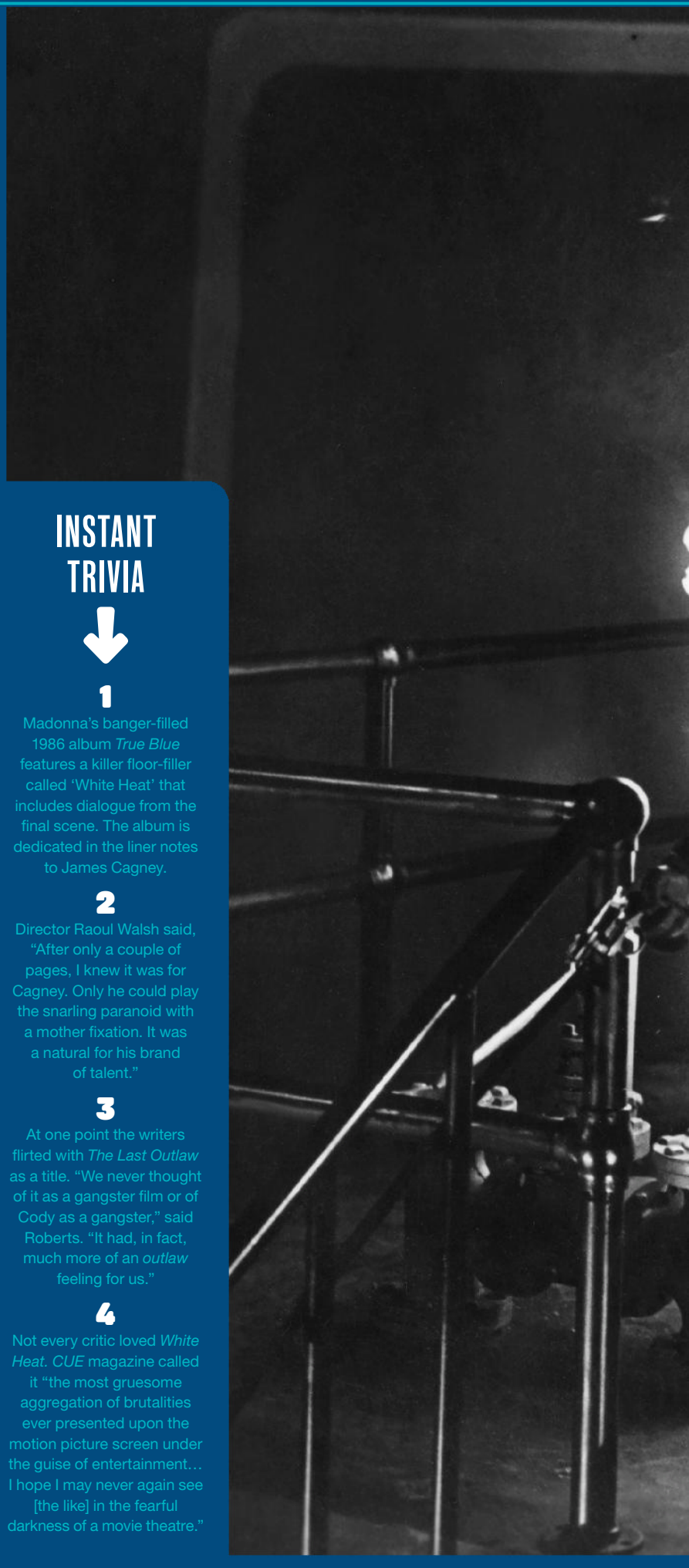
But what wasn't in the script were Jarrett's peals of maniacal laughter. They were ad-libbed by Cagney on set. "When he feels something, he just keeps going," remembered Roberts about Cagney, "and it's usually very good."

The climax was filmed at the Signal Hill oil wells, on the grounds of one of Southern California's largest chemical and oil-refinery plants. With the film shooting in the pre-bullet-squibs age, the production employed pinpoint-accurate marksmen to miss Cagney by mere inches, but when it came to the fiery climax, Raoul Walsh took no chances.

"I happened to be looking at a newsreel one night and I saw this big explosion of this tank," Walsh remembered. "So I got the company to buy the negatives and we double-printed [repeated] it. Jimmy was up there on the tank, but he was never up there when the explosion went off."

The iconic line has become a shorthand for defiant bravado in the face of certain death, riffed on in films (*Britannia Hospital*, *Tough Guys*, *The Adventures Of Ford Fairlaine*, *Richochet*, *Small Soldiers*, *SubUrbia*, *Belfast*), TV (*Cheers*, *The Simpsons*, *The Wonder Years*, *Cracker* and, er, *Supergran*) and music: 50 Cent's 'Crazy', featuring PnB Rock, opens with the line. Less enamoured with the film was Cagney himself, who, in his 1985 autobiography, called it "another cheapjack job". One man's top of the world, Ma, is another man's bottom. **IAN FREER**

***WHITE HEAT* IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL**



INSTANT TRIVIA

1

Madonna's banger-filled 1986 album *True Blue* features a killer floor-filler called 'White Heat' that includes dialogue from the final scene. The album is dedicated in the liner notes to James Cagney.

2

Director Raoul Walsh said, "After only a couple of pages, I knew it was for Cagney. Only he could play the snarling paranoid with a mother fixation. It was a natural for his brand of talent."

3

At one point the writers flirted with *The Last Outlaw* as a title. "We never thought of it as a gangster film or of Cody as a gangster," said Roberts. "It had, in fact, much more of an *outlaw* feeling for us."

4

Not every critic loved *White Heat*. *CUE* magazine called it "the most gruesome aggregation of brutalities ever presented upon the motion picture screen under the guise of entertainment… I hope I may never again see [the like] in the fearful darkness of a movie theatre."



Alamy

"Made it, Ma! Top of the world!": Jimmy Cagney delivers the movie's iconic line.

6 OF THE BEST

Team *Empire* on the month's essential movies

PICK OF THE MONTH



THE SWIMMER

OUT **29 AUGUST** / CERT **PG** / **95 MINS**

An enigmatic, poetic, disturbing 1968 fable from a John Cheever story, this has Burt Lancaster, naked but for trunks, 'swimming home' via a river of backyard pools. With each pool, he encounters different people from his past… and the apparent perfection expected at the swim's end seems more in doubt. It's a memorable premise and sets up a series of elliptical scenes that drop hints about the state of things without saying anything. Lancaster shows off his ageing but impressive physique and crawls inside his cracking-up character. Director Frank Perry — assisted by an uncredited Sydney Pollack — finds sylvan beauties and suburban crassness along the way, leading to an oblique but powerful homecoming finish. **KIM NEWMAN**



INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

OUT **15 AUGUST** / CERT **PG** / **127 MINS**

Often accused of being a mere comedic retread of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, the third Indiana Jones movie (now getting a fancy 4K steelbook release) is admittedly the funniest outing for Harrison Ford's intrepid adventurer, filled with quips of lethal cunning from the uncredited Tom Stoppard. But it's also the most emotionally resonant Indy flick, thanks to that central relationship between him and his disapproving father, a never-better Sean Connery. Steven Spielberg has tackled fatherhood and fathers — usually absent ones — throughout his career, but this is the zenith (at least until *The Fabelmans* hits this year), with the two Jones needling each other relentlessly as they embark upon a chase for the Holy Grail. **CHRIS HEWITT**



EVENT HORIZON

OUT **8 AUGUST** / CERT **18** / 96 MINS

Shout-out to Dr Jane Foster. As Natalie Portman's astrophysicist states in *Thor: Love And Thunder*, when grappling with wormholes and faster-than-light travel, *Interstellar* isn't your only option — Paul W.S. Anderson's 1997 intergalactic gorefest went there first. Here, Sam Neill's Dr William Weir explains folding space-time by punching holes through a poster of a scantily clad woman, with surprising scientific accuracy. The bit he missed out is that sending a ship through there sends you to a Hell dimension. The science isn't the only thing in *Event Horizon* that's aged well — there's that top ensemble (Laurence Fishburne, Joely Richardson and co), the gothic-BDSM aesthetic, and mutilation scenes that remain impressively nasty. **BEN TRAVIS**



BENEDICTION

OUT **8 AUGUST** / CERT **12** / **137 MINS**

Veteran director Terence Davies turns his eye to another thoughtful portrait of an artist reconciling personal struggles with creative ambitions. Siegfried Sassoon is famous for his searing anti-war poetry, but the man behind the words has been a cypher to many. In the ruggedly capable hands of Jack Lowden as a younger Sassoon and Peter Capaldi in his later years, Sassoon is fleshed out, depicted as a principled wordsmith with a sharp wit, but melancholy never far away. His sexuality and his religious faith leave him forever reflective; his experiences in the war leave him with survivor's guilt and regret. There is something movingly, powerfully elegiac about this film: one master, embracing another. **JOHN NUGENT**



RED ROCK WEST

OUT **22 AUGUST** / CERT **15** / **100 MINS**

Arguably Nicolas Cage's finest most-overlooked hour came with this straight-to-video '90s neo-noir from John '*The Last Seduction*' Dahl. Cage is Michael Williams, mistaken for a hitman by a bar-owner (ace character actor J.T. Walsh) who hires him to off his wife (*Twin Peaks*' Lara Flynn-Boyle)... who in turn pays Michael to kill the husband. It gets more complicated when the actual assassin (Dennis Hopper dressed like Johnny Cash) rolls up, and the husband turns out to be the town sheriff. It's a desert-heat-sticky situation, during which Cage reliably unravels, with Michael making terrible life (and death) choices. Whether or not you're a fan of Cage's huge talent, *Red Rock West* is a buried treasure. **DAN JOLIN**



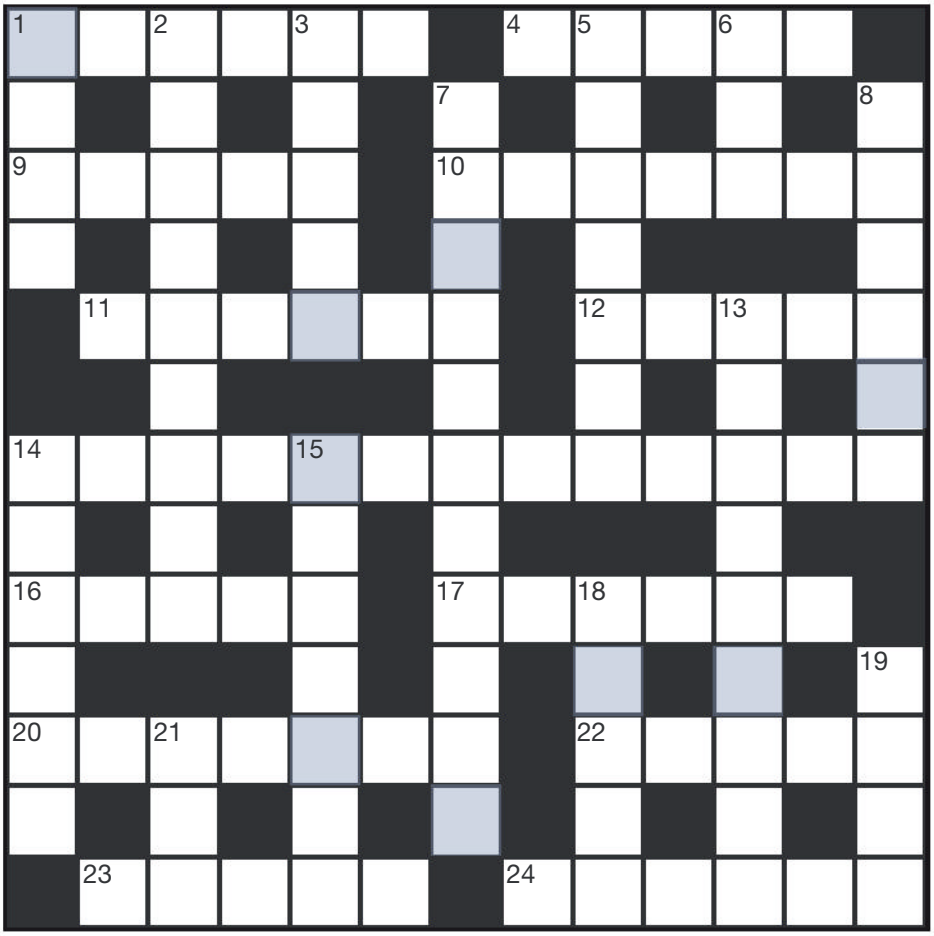
ALL MY FRIENDS HATE ME

OUT **29 AUGUST** / CERT **15** / **94 MINS**

Is there anything more anxiety-inducing than feeling like you're at a party where nobody likes you? Tom Stourton and Tom Palmer explore this nightmare social situation with Brit black comedy *All My Friends Hate Me*, in which Stourton stars as Pete, a guy reuniting with old uni pals for a birthday weekend in a fancy country house. Only thing is, they've brought along an unexpected guest — and Pete can't shake the feeling that something's not quite right. Blending dry humour with creeping dread, the film thrives on stomach-churning subtleties and passive-aggression, with a few thrilling twists thrown in for good measure. A fascinating concept and terrific script delivered by a strong ensemble cast. **SOPHIE BUTCHER**

Alamy, Shutterstock

CROSSWORD AND COMPETITION



ACROSS

1 Zemeckis or Eggers or Altman (6)
4/9 Where Marion Crane took a fateful shower (5,5)
10 Mark, who's been in *Zodiac, Shutter Island* and *Dark Waters* (7)
11 Queen of the Monsters and friend of Godzilla (6)
12 *The — Gun* (Leslie Nielsen) (5)
14 Job title of Marge Gunderson and Martin Brody (5,2,6)
16 Christopher, who was Kal-El and Kent (5)
17 The first name of My Cousin and the woman who played her (6)
20 Could be Bigelow's *Days*, could be a wizard (7)
22 Surname of Cliff in *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood* and Frank in *Blue Velvet* (5)
23 It's what you might expect in a Shyamalan film — or a Dickens adaptation? (5)
24 Felix, as played by Jack Lord through to Jeffrey Wright (6)

DOWN

1 Setting for *Bicycle Thieves*, *La Dolce Vita* and *Zoolander 2* (4)
2 Vehicle driven by Bruce Wayne's alter ego
3/15 Actor whose films include *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *The Forgiven* (5,7)
5 Oscar-winning filmmaker Cuarón
6 Green, who's been *A Dame To Kill For* (3)
7 He directed *Seance On A Wet Afternoon* and *The Stepford Wives* (5,6)
8 Hawn, who played Private Benjamin (6)
13 The tagline said, "Hell, any of them could have done it" (6,3)
14 — *Bride* (Tim Burton) (6)
15 See 3 Down
18 Josh Brolin's super-soldier in *Deadpool 2* (5)
19 Cage co-star, Mermaid mother and a Witch Of Eastwick (4)
21 Julia Ducournau's debut feature (3)

WIN!

RED SONJA 4K STEELBOOK



A true retro classic, Richard Fleischer's *Red Sonja*, starring '80s icon Brigitte Nielsen and — he needs no introduction — Arnold Schwarzenegger, has finally been given a shiny new 4K restoration. And, as befits a beloved cult favourite, it now comes in a fancy steelbook package. Legendary Italian artist Renato Casaro, who designed the film's original poster back in 1985, has created new artwork for the release, and a look back at his work, 2020 documentary *The Last Movie Painter*, appears as a bonus extra with the release. We have five copies to give away, so if you fancy getting your hands on one, crack the crossword, solve the anagram and follow the entry instructions below.

THE *RED SONJA* 4K STEELBOOK IS OUT NOW

COMPETITION ENDS 29 AUGUST

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, director or character. Visit www.empireonline.com/crossword and fill out the form, along with your answer, in the provided field. Entry is free and closes at midnight on 29 August. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

AUGUST ANSWERS ACROSS: **1** Hustler, **5** Crash, **7** Widow, **8** Gaumont, **9** Ewen, **10** Ordinary, **12** Dean, **13** Club, **18** Cast Away, **19** Elsa, **21** Campion, **22** Thorn, **23** Conan, **24** Striker. **DOWN:** **1** Hawkeye, **2** Syd Mead, **3** Lowe, **4** Rogers, **5** Crucible, **6** Sandra, **11** Vacation, **14** Bullock, **15** Ed Asner, **16** Sadako, **17** Cannes, **20** Star.

ANAGRAM PANDORA

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Entries are free. Entries must be received before 30 August or will not be valid. The Competition is only open to people aged 18 and over who live in the United Kingdom and are not a Bauer employee or their immediate family. One winner will be selected at random from all valid entries. Competition promoted by H Bauer Publishing t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final, and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, via email, between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will email the winner a maximum of three times. If the winner does not respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner at random and the original winner will not win a prize. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full T&Cs see http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html



CLASSIC SCENE

Standout sequences from the great movies

Pig Chosen by RACHEL McADAMS

Rachel McAdams: "The scene where Nicolas Cage is talking to the restauranteur who does all the modern food. There's such a kindness to it, but it was so unexpected. He's playing this really gruff character, you feel like he's turned his back on the world... And then you realise that he cares so deeply, it pains him so much to see how human beings sabotage themselves. There's such a wealth of emotion in that scene, and to watch Nicolas Cage be like, 'You guys think I only do *this*' — it was a chef's kiss."

INT. TRENDY RESTAURANT EURYDICE — DAY

Rob's (Cage) search for his abducted truffle pig has led him and his friend Amir (Alex Wolff) to restaurant Eurydice, at which he, face bloodied after an assault, sits down with its chef patron, a former employee of his called Derek (David Knell). Rob is looking for information, but first has some home truths to impart.

ROB: What is the concept here?

Derek, somewhat taken aback, glances at Amir, before deciding to answer the question.

DEREK: Um, well, we're interested in taking local ingredients native to this region and, and just deconstructing them. Making the familiar feel foreign, thereby giving us an even greater appreciation of food as a whole.

ROB: This is the kind of cooking you like?

DEREK: It's cutting-edge. It's very exciting.

ROB: Exciting.

DEREK: I mean, everybody loves it.

Rob stares at him.

ROB: You like cooking it?

DEREK: Absolutely.

ROB: Derek… what was it you always used to talk about opening? Wasn't it a pub?

DEREK: [*beginning to stammer*] E-e-everyone loves it here. This is a huge success.

ROB: Why didn't you open your pub?

Derek begins to falter over his words, eventually finding some.

DEREK: I don't know that I really wanted… I mean, that was such a long time ago.

ROB: When I fired you I asked you what you wanted to do. You said you'd have a few rooms upstairs. A real English pub.

DEREK: Did I… did I say that?

ROB: Yes.

DEREK: Nobody wants pubs around here. It's… that's… that's just a terrible investment.

ROB: What was going to be your signature dish?

DEREK: [*instantly*] Liver Scotch eggs with a honey curry mustard.

He laughs at the thought.

ROB: They're not real. You get that, right? None of it is real. The critics aren't real. The customers aren't real. Because… this isn't real. You aren't real.

Derek, trying to recover his composure, points and laughs at Rob.

DEREK: You… okay…

ROB: Derek, why do you care about these people? They don't care about you. None of 'em. They don't even know you. Because you haven't shown them. Every day you'll wake up and there'll be less of you. You live your life for them, and they don't even see you. You don't even see yourself. [*Pause*] We don't get a lot of things to really care about.

Derek is now on the verge of tears. He raises his wine glass. So does Rob. They drink. Derek drains his glass.

ROB: Derek. Who has my pig?



LastExitToNowhere.com
FILM AND TV INSPIRED T-SHIRTS AND APPAREL

"For serious movie geeks, these shirts are esoteric in the coolest possible way." Irish Times


THEY HUNT TO LIVE,
IT LIVES TO HUNT.
18+
20th Century Studios
PREY
©2022 20th Century Studios. Subscription Required. 18+
Original movie
Streaming Aug 5
Disney+